

In the Company of Those Who Fast

Salman al-Oadah

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Introduction

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. May Allah's peace and blessings be upon the noblest of His prophets and messengers, our Prophet Muhammad, and upon his family and Companions.

This book covers a variety of topics that relate to fasting and the month of Ramadān, especially those that shed light on why we fast and what we are supposed to get out of it. Our worship should be more than outward rituals. There are deeper meanings behind what we do, and they come before the conspicuous expressions of worship. Allah does not want us to just go through the motions. We need to feel the deeper spiritual and devotional aspects of Ramadān.

The month of Ramadān is an intensive course in faith. We engage in various acts of worship in turn: prayer, fasting, charity, and reading the Qur'an. When we learn to understand and appreciate why these acts of worship are prescribed for us and therefore offer them correctly, we derive the full benefit from them and they have a profound effect on our lives. As Allah says: "O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it had been prescribed for those who came before you, that perchance you can be God-fearing." [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 183]

Many of the great and blessed events in our history took place in Ramadān. The greatest of these is the revelation of the Qur'an. It is therefore a month of commemoration as well as a month of worship and active engagement. Therefore, its arrival deserves our warmest welcome, and the best way we can give it that welcome is to develop a deep understanding of great virtue of this month and the worship we are about to engage in.

The following chapters are enriched by verses of the Qur'an and the words of our Prophet. They also include the thoughts of many of Islam's great thinkers. It is hoped that this book will provide us with provisions we can draw upon to support us while we are fasting. It is meant to be read individually, with our families, and with the people of our communities.

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The first edition of this book came as the result of lessons I gave during Ramadān back in 1990, which were then published in book form the following year as *Ramadān Lessons*. An expanded edition came out in 2007, with the title *Ramadān Discussions*.

Thereafter, I revised the book thoroughly, correcting and changing some things, adding additional material, and addressing new concerns that came up over the years. I added material from the daily Ramadān television programs that I presented every year, as well as from various articles and studies I published in print and online. I also benefited from the work of others, like Ibn `Uthaymīn, Sayyid b. Husayn al-`Affānī, and Muhammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Hamad.

I look forward to the feedback of my readers, who can reach me via e-mail or Facebook, or by way of any of the other contact methods given at the beginning of this book. I happily welcome your suggestions, observations, and criticisms, which help me immensely in improving myself and my work. I thank everyone who takes the time to read this book and provide me with their comments and corrections.

I ask Allah to make this book something I have undertaken solely for His sake, and that it counts among my good deeds. All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.

Salman al-Oadah
Cape Town
4 May 2011

Welcoming Ramadān

Welcome to the month of goodness and mercy, the month of repentance and forgiveness, the month of remembering Allah and reading the Qur'an. The arrival of Ramadān is a joyous occasion and a great blessing. So let's welcome this generous month and this noble season.

The righteous believers cannot help but rejoice at the arrival of Ramadān. It is the month wherein they develop their piety and faith through the exercise of willpower and self-restraint.

How can we not rejoice when we recall the numerous blessings Allah has prepared for us, and how He will forgive us our sins and reward us for our good deeds many times over? How can the believers not rejoice at the prospect of Tarāwīh prayer by which our sins are forgiven and past mistakes wiped away? How can we not rejoice at the Night of Decree, Laylah al-Qadr, a night that is better than a thousand months?

How can we not rejoice at the month of the Qur'an, the month of remembering Allah and the spiritual climate that spreads its sweet fragrance everywhere. It is the month when our souls are at ease and our hearts feel large and full of goodness. This is Allah's grace. "Say: In the bounty of Allah and in His mercy - in that let them rejoice." [*Sūrah Yūnus*: 58]

The month of Ramadān makes all believers rejoice and puts their hearts at ease. It is a time to develop ourselves spiritually, where we can rid ourselves of bad ingrained habits and develop good ones. We need to appreciate this opportunity and the powerful effect it can have on us. The extra worship we are encouraged to engage in during this month, whether great or small, should have a lasting and substantial effect. It does not have to be something transient or seasonal.

Ramadān Greetings

At the start of the month, the believers exchange special greetings and happy salutations, using all sorts of joyful expressions. They convey these salutations in person and through SMS

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messages, choosing the sweetest words along with prayers of blessing and gentle advice.

Festive greetings are customary for all joyful occasions, as well as for occasions when something harmful is avoided. Sheikh `Abd al-Rahmān al-Sa`dī explains:

Issues like these [greetings] are governed by an important and beneficial principle, which is that all customary practices, whether words or deeds, are assumed to be permissible. None of these customs should be considered forbidden or disliked in Islam unless they are expressly prohibited by Allah, or bring about bad consequences that contradict with Islamic teachings. The Qur'an and Sunnah attest to this essential principle many times, which has been enumerated by Ibn Taymiyah and others... Some customs and general practices can bring about benefits and good consequences that Allah loves, while others can bring about bad and harmful consequences that make them worthy of being forbidden. This principle has many practical examples.

We can consider the occasion when the boycott was lifted from three people who had stayed behind without an excuse and Allah revealed to the Prophet that He had accepted their repentance. The Prophet congratulated Ka'b b. Malik about it, saying "Be joyful. Allah has accepted your repentance." Ibn al-Qayyim comments on this, saying:

It shows that it is desirable to congratulate someone when something good happens to them in their religious life. It is good to go to them and shake their hand. This is a recommended Sunnah practice. It is likewise a permissible act when something good happens to someone in their worldly life. It is best to say something like: "May you find every good in what Allah has given you and what He has blessed you with." In this way, we give credit to Allah for the blessing and offer a supplication for the person who has received it.

The vast majority of Islamic jurists agree that there is nothing wrong or objectionable with the likes of Eid greetings. This is the most well-known opinion of Ahmad b. Hanbal. Some scholars have gone further to assert that Eid greetings are a confirmed religious practice. Ibn Qudāmah writes in his great Islamic legal encyclopaedia, *al-Mughnī*:

Ahmad said: “There is nothing wrong with one person saying to another on the day of Eid: ‘May Allah accept it from us and from you’.” Harb mentions that Ahmad was questioned concerning people saying this phrase to each other on the two Eid days. He answered: “There is nothing wrong with it. This has been related from Abū Umamah by people of Syria.” He was asked whether it was also related from Wāthilah b. al-Asqā, to which he replied in the affirmative. When asked if it was disliked to say this on the day of Eid, Ahmad said: “No, it isn’t.”

Ibn ‘Aqīl mentions some hadīth that provide direct evidence for such greetings. For instance, he mentions that Muhammad b. Ziyād relates from Abū Umāmah al-Bāhilī and others from among the Prophet’s Companions that when they returned from the Eid prayer, they would say to each other: “May Allah accept it from us and from you.” Ahmad regarded its chain of transmission to be a good one.

‘Alī b. Thābit tells us that he asked Mālik b. Anas thirty-five years before about this matter, and Mālik replied: “This has always been the practice in Madinah.”

There can be no doubt that the arrival of Ramadān is one of the greatest of blessings.

How People Prepare for Ramadān

People prepare for Ramadān in many different ways.

1. Some people prepare for the arrival of this special month by purifying their hearts and increasing their portion of worship. They strive to make their intentions sincere to Allah alone, and they turn

to Him in repentance. They prepare themselves to benefit for the spiritual opportunities this month provides and the chance to be among the righteous.

There are few believers who do not change their habits of worship, at least a little, during this month. We are truly blessed when Allah turns our hearts to this aspect of Ramadān, and we strengthen it with acts of devotion. We give in charity, show kindness to our relatives, help the poor and needy, and seek the pardon of the people around us for any wrongs we may have done to them. Whenever our resolve slackens in the least, we renew our commitment and keep striving.

It is vital for our imāms and preachers to consider the mindset of the people they address in their sermons and employ the best means to cultivate this spirit in them. They should not use negative reinforcement too much or emphasise the people's shortcomings. Positive encouragement is just as important. The most important thing to emphasise is the love of Allah, because this is essential. Many scholars, like Ibn `Abd al-Barr and Ibn Bāz, have noted that at times when people are lax and negligent in their religious duties, the best strategy is one of encouragement. People are more receptive to it.

2. Some people prepare for the arrival of Ramadān by shopping. They spend many hours in the marketplace buying foodstuffs, drinks, and other things they need in the kitchen. This is good as long as it is done in moderation. It is good to show extra kindness to one's family during this month. Money brings its benefits when it is spent, and generosity is blessed while stinginess is sinful.

At the same time, Ramadān is an opportunity for us to rid ourselves of the crass consumerism that steers our spirits most of the time. This is especially true for those of us who live in affluent societies. Sadly, some people prepare for Ramadān as if it were an impending crisis.

Excessive spending on food, drink, appliances, automobiles, clothing, and other consumer goods is a bad habit that needs to be rectified. It is not good for someone to enter a store to buy one thing and leave with a dozen others, simply because they might prove useful one day.

We need to safeguard our wealth, whether it takes the form of money, water, petroleum, or anything else. Our resources are for future generations as well as for us. Allah says: “And He it is who causes gardens to grow, [both] trellised and untrellised, and palm trees and crops of different [kinds of] food and olives and pomegranates, similar and dissimilar. Eat of [each of] its fruit when it yields and pay what is due on it on the harvest day. And be not wasteful. Indeed, He does not like those who squander.” [*Sūrah al-An`ām*: 141]

In this verse, Allah first mentions that we should use our wealth and eat of it, but He also says that there are others who need it and have a right to it. Then He goes on to prohibit wasting that wealth and squandering it. This is the way to achieve sustainable development in every aspect of life, for the present generation and the generations to come. Those who put this into practice are also among the beneficiaries of its success.

This blessed month is an opportunity for adults to learn how to be moderate in their spending and consumption. It is also a chance for them to impart these lessons to their children. It is natural for people to underestimate the value of the things they have and look longingly at what they do not possess. It is not prudent to replace your cell phone, laptop, or car simply because a new model has been rereleased on the market. On the larger scale, safeguarding the Earth’s resources is critical for the continuance of life in the future.

Chasing after fashion and replacing one’s wardrobe to keep up with the latest trends is both a waste of money and a denial of our individuality.

It has been reported that per capita consumption of water in the Gulf states is three times higher than normal. This is blatant waste. Allah says: “Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Allah does not love those who are excessive.” [*Sūrah al-A`rāf*: 31]

Prophet Muhammad once passed by Sa`d b. Abī Waqqās while he was making his ablutions for prayer. The Prophet said to him: “What is this wastefulness I see?”

Sa`d replied: “Is there wastefulness in performing ablutions?”

The Prophet said: “Yes, there is, even if you are making your ablutions in a flowing river.” [*Musnad Ahmad* (7065) and *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (425)]

It has also been reported that Saudi Arabia consumes as much tea and rice as a nation of 100 million people. Other reports have uncovered that roughly fifty percent of the food prepared at home ends up in the garbage, while thirty percent of the people do not bother to seek out the needy – or even animals – to give them the excess food, nor do they donate it to charitable organisations for distribution.

The extra spending on food in Ramadān is often accompanied by inflated prices. This means that interventions are needed to ensure that the prices of necessary items are not raised unjustly so poorer people can meet their needs. Vendors and merchants need to be reminded of their duty to their Lord and ensure that their profits are lawful, even if they are less than they could be. Allah will bless their lawful wealth and increase it.

When we enrich ourselves at the expense of the poor and needy who are struggling to get the bare necessities, it can lead us to being deprived of blessing and coming to a bad end. This is especially true in the month of Ramadān when we are supposed to strive with one another for the chance to spend on others and help them fulfil their needs. Allah says: “And for this let the competitors compete.” [*Sūrah al-Mutaffifin*: 26]

3. Some people prepare for the arrival of Ramadān by watching the month’s special television programmes. A number of these appear on the satellite networks, the radio, and the Internet. Each participant contributes what he or she has to offer. There are some very good and appropriate programs that discuss building good moral values. However, there are also programs that seek merely to earn profits during the month, and care nothing for moral values. These programs do not pay any consideration for the sacredness of the month.

4. Some young people in Saudi Arabia prepare for the arrival of Ramadān by engaging in sports programmes. They associate this month with night-time sporting events under the floodlights. Some of them spend the entire night playing games up until the time of the pre-dawn meal.

Sports in moderation is a good thing. It promotes physical fitness and helps prepare young people to meet life's many challenges. `Umar b. al-Khattāb used to say: "Teach your children swimming, archery, and horsemanship." However it becomes blameworthy when it is taken to excess and intrudes into the time for other things, and when it is shown too much importance. Bodily health is something that Islam seeks to ensure, and sensible recreation is also a good thing. Everything has its limits and its appropriate time.

When young people spend the night in Ramadān in sports, whether as players or as spectators, what are they going to do during the day? Will they have the energy to work, study at school, or engage in worship?

Ramadān is an opportunity to change our daily routine. This means it is a chance for us to make positive changes in our lives. It is a tragedy for this month to be employed to the opposite effect, so that one more bad habit is added to the list. This is the bad habit of staying up all night, which harms the body, has a negative effect on the brain cells, and makes the face and skin age faster. Its harmfulness extends to the mind and the spirit as well, compromising our sense of wellbeing and impairing our ability to enjoy life. This is why Allah says: "And We have made your sleep a means for rest, and made the night as a covering, and We made the day for seeking livelihood." [*Sūrah al-Naba'*: 9-11]

It is odd that people living in the major cities in the Muslim world tend to stay up all night, whereas people elsewhere in the world generally go to bed early. When we compare the sleeping habits of people in Tokyo, Washington, and London with those of people in Riyadh, Dubai, and Cairo, we see a startling difference. In some cities of the Muslim world, many of the inhabitants stay up the entire night, sleeping only after daybreak. Yet, "Allah has given a due measure for everything." [*Sūrah al-Talāq*: 3]

Muslims should try to realize the purpose of fasting, which is "that perchance you can be God-fearing." [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 183] Therefore, it is essential to abandon false speech, looking at unlawful sights, lewdness, and wasting time in vain pursuits. If we cannot abandon these things, then Allah has no need for our abandoning food and drink.

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We fast for Allah's sake alone, intending to please Him and seeking His reward. However, the rewards and benefits of fasting are entirely for the worshippers themselves. Allah has no need for it. He says: "If you disbelieve (and are thankless), truly Allah has no need of you; but He likes not ingratitude from His servants. If you are grateful, He is pleased with you." [*Sūrah al-Zumar*: 7]

Blessed are those who hasten to do good with their short lives and do not neglect the opportunities they have. Ramadān is indeed a most unique opportunity for us. None of us know if we will live to see another. We speak about our friends and loved ones who have passed away. Do we not realise that one day it will be others speaking about us like that?

“Fasting Has Been Prescribed for You...”

Allah says: “O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it had been prescribed for those who came before you, that perchance you can be God-fearing.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 183]

Allah begins by saying: “*O you who believe...*” He is addressing the believers here. Non-believers need to be called to faith first. They need to believe in Allah, His messengers, and the Qur’an. Once they accept this, then they will be receptive to this verse about fasting.

This is why most of the earlier verses of the Qur’an which were revealed in Mecca begin with the address: “O humankind...” The later, Madinite verses are more likely to begin with: “O you who believe...”

Allah then says: “*Fasting is prescribed for you...*” This is rich in its implications. The moment we hear that fasting has been “prescribed”, we know that it is an obligation, and one that is incumbent upon all Muslims. Then, Allah tells us that it was also prescribed for the religious communities that came before Islam. It was therefore, brought by the messengers who were sent to them. Though we know this to be the case, we do not find fasting prescribed in the earlier scriptures as a direct command and obligation. It is rather presented in terms of encouragement and praise. This could possibly be on account of textual corruption.

The Arabic word for fasting, *sawm*, means to refrain from something, or to hold back from something. The word is used where Allah says: “Say: I have taken an oath to the Beneficent that I will refrain from speaking to any person today.” [*Sūrah Maryam*: 26]

Fasting, in Islamic Law, is to refrain from the things that break the fast for a specified period of time, doing so with the intention of worship. The Arabs in pre-Islamic times understood fasting as abstaining from food and drink. They used to fast on ‘Āshūrā’. ‘Ā’ishah tells us:

In the days of ignorance before Islam, the tribe of Quraysh used to fast the day of ‘Āshūrā’. The Prophet used to observe

this fast as well. Then, when he came to Madinah, he continued to fast it and enjoined it upon others. Then, when the fast in Ramadān was revealed, it became the obligation instead, and fasting Āshūrā' became optional for those who wished to do so.

It is not considered fasting to abstain from certain foods or beverages, while consuming others. That had been a practice among the Arabs before Islam. It was also the practice of the Nabateans as well as some of the Jews and Christians.

Allah says: "...as it had been prescribed for those who came before you...". The apparent meaning of the verse is that fasting had been prescribed for all previous peoples from the time of Adam onwards, and not only for the Jews and Christians. This may be true, but it does not mean that everyone fasted the way we understand fasting today, nor that they fasted in the month of Ramadān. It just means that some sort of fasting had been prescribed for them.

Then He says: "...that perchance you can be God-fearing." This begins with faith, and with submission to Allah. Anyone who believes and embraces Islam has safeguarded themselves from unbelief and Allah's punishment. By fasting, a person goes further and carries out one of the pillars of Islam. This is another measure of being God-fearing, even if a person's observance of the fast has some shortcomings.

This is why the Prophet said: "Fasting is a shield" and then added: "as long as you do not breach it."

There are numerous benefits we can take from this verse.

1. By declaring that fasting is prescribed, this verse establishes the obligation of fasting the month of Ramadān. Muslims are unanimously agreed that every able-bodied, legally accountable Muslim must fast for the duration of the month. This ruling is also attested by the Sunnah. Prophet Muhammad said: "Islam is built upon five pillars..." of which one is "fasting the month of Ramadān". [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (8) and *Sahīh Muslim* (16)] There has never been any doubt among Muslims that fasting Ramadān is a legal obligation.

“Fasting Has Been Prescribed for You...”

2. The verse shows that the underlying purpose of fasting is to help Muslims in their spiritual development so they can become more God-fearing. Allah did not impose fasting on us to punish us or to make things difficult by depriving us of what we desire. Instead, He prescribed it for us to make us more God-conscious.

Fasting is likewise a chance for us to show our willingness to give up something we desire for His sake. Our moral development requires us to rein in many of our desires. This is not easy. It requires effort and takes patience. In this way, we strengthen ourselves so we can live ethical lives.

One of the most destructive ways to live life is through the unchecked pursuit of our desires, without considering the harm that our actions can cause for ourselves and others. A person who lives in this way has no self-control and no ability to engage in anything that requires effort.

By depriving ourselves of food, drink, and other lawful pleasures for Allah’s sake as an act of worship and devotion, we fortify our hearts and triumph over our desires. It makes it easier for us to stay away from sin. What is the point in depriving ourselves of food and drink if we are going to persist in slander, suspicion, rumour-mongering, and cheating?

3. If we look at the broader context, we find that *Sūrah al-Baqarah* provides a lengthy discussion on the behaviour of the Jews of old, how they disputed with their prophets and acted belligerently with them. This verse comes in the middle of these discussions declaring: “O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it had been prescribed for those who came before you, that perchance you can be God-fearing.” Moreover, the Muslims were having difficulty with the Jews in Madinah at the time the verse was revealed. So we can ask: What is the significance of the verse of fasting appearing in this context with this direct reference to the People of the Book?

It seems that the verse is providing a lesson to the Muslims in the need to behave equitably and justly with others, and to acknowledge their merits. This theme is found elsewhere in the Qur’an. For instance, Allah says: “O you who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in fair dealing, and let not hatred of any people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness.

And fear Allah ; indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do.” [Sūrah al-Mā'idah: 8] Likewise, Allah says: “No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another.” [Sūrah al-Isrā': 15]

Likewise, we have where the Prophet said on one occasion: “Indeed that person has spoken the truth, though he is a consummate liar.” [Sahīh al-Bukhārī (2311)] This emphasizes how a Muslim must acknowledge the truth, whatever its source. Even if the other people hate you or you hate them, this does not give you the right to deny their merit or the good that they do.

We find the same lesson being given where Allah declares: “Lo! (the mountains) Safā and Marwah are among the rites of Allah. Therefore, it is no sin for one who is on pilgrimage to the House (of Allah), in the pilgrimage season or outside of it, to walk between them.” [Sūrah al-Baqarah: 158] The pagans in Mecca used to walk between Safā and Marwah, calling out to their idols. For this reason, the Muslims found it difficult to go between them when making pilgrimage. This is why Allah declares there is no sin in doing so, because passing between them during the pilgrimage was indeed the practice of the prophets.

The same can be said for fasting the day of 'Āshūrā'. This was the practice of the Jews, who venerated the day. Prophet Muhammad said: “I have more rights to Moses than you do.” So he fasted 'Āshūrā' and enjoined it upon his followers. [Sahīh al-Bukhārī (2004) and Sahīh Muslim (1130)]

4. When Allah says “...as it had been prescribed for those who came before you”, it shows the greatness of the fast. Allah would not prescribe something for all the prophets and all the past nations if it were not of the utmost importance. All the prophets and messengers were united in the essential matters of faith, disagreeing only in the details of the law they were sent with. Prophet Muhammad said: “The prophets were all brothers from the same father. Their mothers were different, and their religion was one.” [Sahīh al-Bukhārī (3443) and Sahīh Muslim (2365)] Fasting was one of the essential matters of faith that all the prophets and messengers came with. It is therefore one of the greatest acts of worship.

5. The verse makes the Muslims aware that they are not the only ones to observe this act of worship. All of the prophets fasted, as did all the religious communities of old. This is an

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encouragement to fast. It strengthens our hearts to observe what Allah commanded us, as well as those who came before us, to observe.

6. When Allah says “*Fasting is prescribed for you...*”, He is referring to the fast that is clearly defined in Islamic teachings. However, in this verse, its time and manner are not specified. Some of the early Muslim scholars have told us that fasting had been a general prescription at the beginning of Islam. It has been said that at first, fasting was enjoined upon the Muslims as three days in every month. We have already seen that before Ramadān was made obligatory, the Muslims were obliged to fast the day of ‘Āshūrā’. This may have been the first stage in fasting becoming obligatory for the Muslims.

7. This verse shows us how Islamic Law came in gradual stages. Ibn al-‘Arabī says: “Islamic Law did not come all at once, and its details were not explained in a single instance. It came gradually, in increments, according to the needs of the community and the dictates of great wisdom.”

This is one of the unique qualities of Islamic Law. It applies to religious duties like prayer as well as religious prohibitions like alcoholic beverages. In the early days of Islam, prayers were all performed as two-units. Later, the number of units were increased for prayers offered at home and kept at two units for travellers.

‘Ā’ishah said: “Allah first enjoined prayer as two units for residents as well as people on a journey. This remained the case for travelers, and the length of prayer was increased for those who were not travelling.” [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (350) and *Sabīh Muslim* (685)]

Likewise, the prohibition of wine did not happen all at once. It took place in three stages.

It is significant that the verse of fasting begins with an appeal to faith: “*O you who believe!*” This inspires the listeners to reflect on their faith in their Lord from the start, hearkening them to pay attention and take heed. Then, further encouragement comes in declaring fasting to be an obligation prescribed for them. Had fasting been presented as a recommended act, some people would be less vigilant in observing it.

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Then Allah says: “...as it had been prescribed for those who came before you”, telling the Muslims that this obligation has not only been imposed upon them.

Then they are told that they are the ones who are intended by this command, and they are the ones to benefit from it.: “...that perchance you can be God-fearing.”

In the very next verse, Allah makes it clear that the fast does not go beyond a limited number of days. It is only for a short period of time. Even then, there are concessions for those who find difficulty. At the beginning of Islam, those who did not wish to fast could pay an expiation instead. Even after this ruling changed, many concessions remained which became a permanent part of Islamic Law. One of these is the concession for those who are sick or on a journey to refrain from fasting and make up the missed days later on. Allah concludes this exposition with the words: “Allah want to make things easy for you. He does not want things to be difficult for you.” [Sūrah al-Baqarah: 185]

Therefore, we see in this passage of the Qur’an many ways in which the obligation to fast Ramadān came gradually, taking into consideration the people’s needs and circumstances. There is a lesson in this for those who wish to call people to Islam. Here, Allah is calling the Muslims to an essential pillar of Islam, but we see over a dozen ways in which Allah uses a gradual approach, encouragement, and positive appeals to present this obligation. We see how Allah seeks to make things easy on the believers. This shows us that when we call people to righteousness, we should do so kindly and take it easy with them.

We find this in Prophet Muhammad’s life, and he is our best example. Anas b. Mālik relates the following:

Three men came to the Prophet’s households, inquiring with his wives about how the Prophet worshipped Allah. When they learned about his practices, it seemed that they did not regard it as enough for them. They said: “Where are we with respect to Allah’s Messenger, for whom Allah has forgiven all of his past and future sins?”

Then one of them said: “I will fast without breaking my fast.”

Another said: “I will pray throughout the night and not sleep.”

And another said: “I will forsake marriage.”

When the Prophet learned of what had transpired between them, he said: “What is the matter with some people saying this and that, while I pray as well as sleep, I fast and break my fast, and I marry women? Whoever desires something other than my practice is not from me.” [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (5063) and *Sabīh Muslim* (1401)]

We find among the Pious Predecessors some of them conducting themselves within the limits of the Prophet’s Sunnah, but doing things that go beyond what following the Sunnah entails. Some of them wished to hold themselves to more than what was required of them. They had different strengths. Some of them had a tendency to be ascetic or had an inclination to study, or to spend in charity. When you read their biographies, it is difficult to imagine how you could ever match their devotion. However, if you turn to the biography of the one they all emulate, and the one who is the best example for the believers to follow, you find that his example is within reach. This tells us something about moderation, especially in what we should expect from others. When we wish to encourage them to better their lives, we should not make the path before them appear difficult. We should rather bolster their spirits and inspire them. When they decide to do what is right, Allah will give them the help they need.

8. Allah says in the very next verse: “Whoever among you is sick or on a journey should make up the number of missed days later on.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 184] Sickness is defined as any state contrary to a state of health. A sick person is permitted to refrain from fasting if fasting will aggravate the illness, postpone recovery, or cause undue discomfort.

Travellers can refrain from fasting if the journey takes them away from their home town and its environs. Some scholars, like the four imams, define this by how many days or kilometres are involved. Other jurists, like Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn al-Qayyim, see

the determining factor to be what is customarily regarded as a journey.

9. Allah says: “...*the number of missed days later on*”, emphasizing that what needs to be made up is the number of missed days only. The days do not have to be made up in succession. Allah is demanding no more than the number itself. There are no other conditions. The days do not have to be made up as soon as the sick person recovers or as soon as the person returns from the journey. `Ā’ishah said: “I once had missed days to make up from Ramadān, and I only made them up in the next year in the month of Sha`bān.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1950) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1146)]

In conclusion, a Muslim who goes through the day in Ramadān hungry and thirsty from fasting should recall to mind the reasons why we fast. The best way to do this is to return to the verses of the Qur’an that speak about fasting, its benefits and virtues, as well and the words of the Prophet. We should do so feeling that these words are addressing each of us individually. This will help us to realize the benefits that fasting is supposed to have in developing our moral character and making us better people.

“Allah want to make things easy for you. He does not want things to be difficult for you. So you should complete the number of days and glorify Allah for His guiding you, that perchance you may be thankful.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 185]

The Spirituality of Fasting

Fasting is one of the noblest forms of worship. This is because it is always performed for Allah alone. Prophet Muhammad informed us that Allah says: “Fasting is for Me, and I will reward it (directly).” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (7492) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1151)]

Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī explains why this is the case: “Allah claims it for Himself, because it is an act that is not performed for other than Allah, unlike prayer, giving charity, engaging in circumambulation, and other acts.” People can engage in other acts of worship to show off to others. This is not the case with fasting, since a person can eat or drink in secret. Nobody would know they were not fasting. Fasting depends for its very occurrence upon an intention in the heart, so a person who fasts for real is doing something that no one else knows about except Allah.

Fasting is a prescription from Allah for spiritual development. It is an intensive course in moral character. It is a good idea for a fasting person to make a conscious intention from the beginning of Ramadān to develop one or more aspects of his or her character, and to monitor the progress made throughout the month.

Fasting is a spiritual challenge. This is one of the ways it benefits those who are unaccustomed to avoiding sin. While fasting, they have to restrain themselves from engaging in lawful things as well, and this makes them more God-conscious, and more acutely aware of the magnitude of their sins. It is a shock to their system, but it is shock therapy that takes a gradual pace and provides many benefits. It is one in which the patient actively participates, since the fasting person willingly engages in this new experience of self-restraint.

Part of this self-restraint is to restrain ourselves from looking at sinful sights and from engaging in sinful speech.

Restraining One's Gaze

Allah says: “Tell the believing men to lower their gazes and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is well acquainted with what they do. And tell the believing women to

lower their gazes and guard their private parts.” [*Sūrah al-Nūr*: 30-31]

Prophet Muhammad said: “If you can guarantee me six things from yourself, I can guarantee you Paradise. Tell the truth when you speak. Keep your promises. Fulfil your trusts. Safeguard your private parts. Lower your gaze (from unlawful sights). And restrain your hands (from harming others).” [*Musnad Ahmad* (227570)]

Jarīr b. Abd Allah asked the Prophet what he should do if he suddenly sees something illicit. The Prophet ordered him to avert his gaze. [*Sahīh Muslim* (2159)]

Ibn Mas`ud said: “Restraining your gaze from unlawful sights is harder than restraining your tongue from wrongful speech.” He also said: “A sin breaches the heart’s protections. Whenever you look at something unlawful, Satan hopes to use it as an opportunity.”

Today, there are all too many opportunities to look at wrongful sights. The mass media bombards us with such images every day. The Internet is full of illicit content, and even pornography is readily accessible to anyone who wants to have access to it. In the marketplaces and public thoroughfares, many people dress immodestly. Even in Muslims countries, you will find a modest woman decently covered from head to toe, and walking beside her another woman who is scantily clad and flaunting herself. Shielding one’s gaze from unlawful sights has become a major trial, especially for young people. Many of them fail to do so, and this failure can lead them to frustration, further sins, and the neglect of good deeds. It causes them to perform their worship half-heartedly. They just find things to be too difficult.

Benefits of Restraining One’s Gaze:

1. It is an act of obeying Allah, which is the greatest way to achieve happiness in this world and the next.
2. It is a way to prevent temptation from poisoning the heart.
3. It makes the heart more aware of Allah and closer to Him.
4. Its practice strengthens and fortifies the heart in the same way that staring at unlawful sights weakens it and causes depression.

5. It illuminates the heart in the same way that the unlawful gaze brings darkness upon it.

6. It helps a person cultivate the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood, and an honest person from a liar.

7. Allah blesses the person with clear insight and understanding to complement their control over their vision.

8. It frustrates Satan in his efforts to access the heart.

9. It cleanses the heart of vested interests and selfish preoccupations.

Young people should never become frustrated in their efforts to guard their vision, and they should never give up. If Satan coaxes them to visit a bad website or look at some bad pictures, they should just as quickly return to Allah and beseech His forgiveness. They should turn to Him in repentance day and night. In the Qur'an, Allah praises: "the patient, the true, the obedient, those who spend in the way of Allah, and those who seek forgiveness before dawn." [*Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*: 17] It is a powerful thing to beseech Allah's forgiveness. It can cleanse the heart and counteract the evil effects of the unlawful sights we take in. It helps us to build our resolve and gives us the moral comfort we need to keep trying. Please be Allah who has prescribed for us to ask His forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance, and who has promised us that He will forgive us.

Safeguarding the Tongue

Al-Nawawī says:

Know that it is the duty upon all legally accountable people to withhold themselves from saying anything except for what provides a clear benefit from being spoken. As for what provides no greater benefit from uttering it than what would ensue from remaining silent, then the Sunnah is to refrain from saying it. This is because permissible speech can lead to the utterance of something sinful or disliked. Indeed, this is what usually happens, and it is best to be on the safe side.

In the Company of Those Who Fast

Al-Thawbān gives the following account of one of his experiences with the Prophet:

We were on a journey with the Prophet when the verse was revealed: “And those who hoard gold and silver...” [*Sūrah al-Tawbah*: 34]

Some of his Companions said: “This is what has been revealed about gold and silver. If we knew of a better currency, we would adopt it.

The Prophet said: “The best of it is a tongue that remembers Allah, a grateful heart, and a believing wife who will help him in his faith.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (3094)]

The Prophet also said: “Whoever believes in Allah and His Messenger should say something good or remain silent.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6018) and *Sahīh Muslim* (47)]

He also said: “A Muslim is someone from whose hands and tongue the other Muslims are safe. An emigrant is one who emigrates from what Allah has prohibited.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (9) and *Sahīh Muslim* (40)]

He said: “A servant may say something he feels to be insignificant, but it will cause him to tumble deeper into the Fire than the distance between the east and west.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6477) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2988)]

He said: “Keep your tongue at bay, be content with your home, and weep over your sins.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2406)]

Once Mu`ādh b. Jabal asked the Prophet to inform him of some good work that would admit him into Paradise and distance him from the Hellfire. The Prophet mentioned to him the virtues of many good deeds, then said: “Shall I inform you of the foundation of all of that?”

Mu`ādh said: “Certainly.”

The Prophet took hold of his own tongue and said: “Restrain yourself from this.”

Mu`ādh then asked: “O Prophet of Allah! Are we held to task for the things that we say?”

The Prophet replied: “May your mother be bereaved of you, O Mu`ādh! Does anything topple people headlong into the Hellfire like the harvests of their tongues?” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2616)]

Ibn Mas`ūd once commented: “Nothing is more deserving of a long incarceration than a person’s tongue.”

The following conversation took place between two of the great Arab sages, Quss b. Sā`idah and Aktham b. Sayfī:

One of them said: “How many faults have you counted among Adam’s descendents?”

The other said: “They are too many to enumerate, but I have counted eight thousand faults. But I have also found that if someone possesses a certain quality, it covers up all of those faults.”

The first one asked: “What is it?”

His companion replied: “To watch what you say.”

Major Crimes of the Tongue:

1. To criticize people’s ancestry, to boast about one’s own ancestry, and to call towards racism and ethnic bigotry. All of this divides society and creates strife among the people. It goes against what Allah tells us: “Indeed, the best of you are the ones who are most God-fearing.” [*Sūrah al-Hujurāt*: 13] What matters is your piety, knowledge, and ethical conduct, not who your forefathers were.

2. To lie. The Prophet said: “Beware of lying, for it leads to iniquity, and iniquity leads to the Hellfire. A man keeps lying and cultivating lies until it is recorded with Allah that he is a ‘liar’.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6094) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2607)]

3. To repeat everything that you hear. The Prophet said: “It is enough to be a liar for a person to reiterate everything he hears.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (5)]

Allah says in the Qur'an: "If a sinful person comes to you with news, verify it." [*Sūrah al-Hujurāt*: 6]

4. To gloat over people's misfortunes, belittle them, or make fun of the way they look or speak.

5. To bear false witness.

6. To remind people of the good things you have done for them to make them feel bad.

The Tongue's Greatest Crime

Backbiting is an abominable sin, and it can really harm a person's fast. It has even been related from `Ā'ishah that backbiting breaks the fast, and the backbiter has to make the day up. The jurist al-Awzā'ī adopted this view. Ibn Hazm went further and claimed that any deliberate commission of sin breaks the fast, unless the person forgets for a moment that he or she is fasting. The truth is that backbiting and other sins do not render one's fast invalid – meaning the fast does not have to be made up – but they can severely reduce the blessings of fasting.

The Prophet defined backbiting as: "mentioning about your brother something that he would dislike having mentioned about him."

Someone asked him: "What if what you say about him is true?"

He replied: "If what you say about him is true, then you have backbitten him. If what you say about him is false, then you have slandered him." [*Sahīh Muslim* (2589)]

It does not matter what the topic is, whether you are saying something bad about the person's religion, personality, worldly status, manners, physical appearance, wealth, family, dress, or behavior. It does not matter if you use words or gestures to communicate your point.

Why People Backbite

There are reasons why people are motivated to backbite others. Chief among these is pride and arrogance which makes someone look down on people. This is often compounded by feelings of

envy for the blessings that other people enjoy. When some people are already engaged in backbiting, it encourages others to join in so they will not be left out or associated with those who are being insulted.

One of the greatest motives for backbiting is a desire for revenge. Sometimes people vent their anger and try to ease their own hearts by speaking ill of the people who upset them. Sometimes, they can employ an indirect approach. When they hear the person's name being mentioned, they say something like: "Allah keep us safe!"

The general rule is that it is sinful to say anything about people that they hate having said about them. Some forms of backbiting are more sinful than others. This depends on many factors, like the speaker's motives and the seriousness of what is said. Attacking someone's faith is far graver than making fun of their shirt.

When we are fasting, we must do everything we can to safeguard our fasts. This includes controlling what we look at and what we say. We do not want hunger and thirst to be all we get out of Ramadān.

Since our tongues are made for talking, the best way we can protect ourselves from saying bad things is to say good things instead. We should enjoin what is right, remind people about what is good, recite the Qur'an, glorify Allah, and beseech Him in supplication. When we speak to people, we can compliment them in moderation. We can share our knowledge with people and give them useful advice. In this way we benefit ourselves, others, and society as a whole.

Allah says: "And say to people a goodly word." [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 83]

Ibn `Abbās said: "if Pharaoh himself said to me 'God bless you', I would reply by saying: 'God bless you too'."

The Month of the Qur'an

Ramadān is the month of the Qur'an. It is the month in which the Qur'an was first revealed. It is the Qur'an which declared the obligation to fast. We are supposed to read the Qur'an more often during Ramadān. Indeed, the angel Gabriel used to review the Qur'an with Prophet Muhammad during this month, emphasizing how strongly Ramadān and the Qur'an are tied together. Allah says: "The month of Ramadān in which the Qur'an was revealed, a guidance for humanity, and clear (signs) for guidance and judgment." [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 185]

Prophet Muhammad said: "Whoever recites a letter of Allah's Book receives a tenfold blessing for it. I do not mean that "*Alif-Lām-Mīm*" is a letter, but rather *alif* is a letter, *lām* is a letter, and *mīm* is a letter." [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2910)]

The Prophet also said: "Read the Qur'an, for it will intercede on the Day of Judgment on behalf of those who read it. Read the two lights: the chapters *al-Baqarah* and *Āl 'Imrān*, because they will come on the Day of Judgment as if they were two large clouds or two flocks of birds arguing in favour of their companions. Read *al-Baqarah*, for there are blessings in taking it up, and loss in neglecting it, and those who practice magic cannot abide it." [*Sahīh Muslim* (804)]

He also said: "Someone who is proficient at reciting the Qur'an will be in the company of those angels who are scribes, noble and righteous; and someone who falters in reading the Qur'an, and has difficulty in reciting it, gets a double reward." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (4937) and *Sahīh Muslim* (798)]

Allah commands us to recite His book, and He describes it as the way of the righteous people: "Those who recite the Book of Allah, establish regular Prayer, and spend (in charity) out of what We have provided for them, secretly and openly, hope for a commerce that will never perish: that He will pay them back fully their rewards and give them more out of His grace. Surely He is forgiving and appreciative." [*Sūrah Fātir*: 29-30]

We profit so much from reading the Qur'an, whatever the time of year. However, Ramadān is the most blessed time to do so. The Prophet used to pay more attention to the Qur'an in this month than at any other time. There are a number of reasons for this:

First, the Qur'an was first revealed in Ramadān. It was on a night in Ramadān that the angel Gabriel came to the Prophet with the verses: "Read in the name of your Lord Who created; who created the human being from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by way of the pen." [*Sūrah al-`Alaq*: 1-5]

`A'ishah relates the following from what her husband, the Prophet mentioned to her about that night:

The way the revelation first began for Allah's Messenger was a true dream that occurred while he was asleep. Anything he would see in his dream would come true as clear as day. Then seclusion became dear to him, and he would retreat to the cave of Hirā' to worship for nights on end before returning to his family. He would take provisions with him for this. Then he would return to Khadījah, his wife, then prepare his provisions for another period of seclusion.

This continued until the truth came to him in the cave of Hirā'. The angel came to him and ordered him to read. The Prophet replied: "I do not know how to read."

The Prophet told me: "Then he grabbed me and pressed me to him so hard until I could not bear it any more. Then he released me and again asked me to read and I replied: 'I do not know how to read.' Thereupon, he grabbed me again and pressed me a second time until I could not bear it anymore. He then released me again and said: 'Read in the name of your Lord Who has created, Who created the human being from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous...'"

Then Allah's Messenger returned with the revelation, and his heart was pounding. He went to Khadījah and said: "Cover me up, cover me up." She covered him until his fear subsided; then he told her what had happened and said: "I fear for myself."

Khadijah then said: "Never! I swear by Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your relatives, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously, and help those who are stricken with misfortune."

Khadijah then took him to see her cousin Waraqah b. Nawfal, who, during the period of ignorance, had become a Christian and was able to write in the Hebrew script. He could write from the Gospel in Hebrew as much as Allah wished him to write. He was an old man and had lost his eyesight.

Khadijah said to him: "O my cousin, listen to the story of your nephew."

Waraqah asked: "O my nephew, what have you seen?" Allah's Messenger informed him of what he had seen. Waraqah then said to him: "This is the same one whom Allah sent to Moses. I wish I was young and could live up to the time when your people will turn you out."

Allah's Messenger said: "Will they drive me out?"

He answered: "Yes, no man has ever come with the likes of what you come with except that the people treated him with hostility, and if I should remain alive until that day, I will support you strongly." But after a few days, Waraqah died. The revelation ceased for a while.

This all happened in Ramadān. Some scholars, like Ibn al-Jawzī, interpret the verse "The month of Ramadān in which the Qur'an was revealed..." to refer to this night and to when the revelation of the Qur'an began.

The following verses most likely refers to that night in the cave of Hirā': "Indeed, We sent it down on a blessed night, for We ever wish to warn (against evil)." [*Sūrah al-Dukhān*: 3] and: "Indeed, we sent it down on the Night of Decree" [*Sūrah al-Qadar*: 1]

Second, it was during Ramadān that the Qur'an in its entirety was sent from the Preserved Tablet down to the lowest heaven and from there the verses were revealed gradually to the Prophet Muhammad over the course of the next twenty-three years, often in response to the various circumstances and situations the Muslims

were experience. This has been asserted by many of the Prophet's Companions, like `Ā'ishah and Wāthilah b. al-Ashqa', and has been attributed to the Prophet in some traditions. Moreover, many of the Companions identified the Night of Decree as the night when this happened.

Third, the angel Gabriel used to come to the Prophet every night in Ramadān and review the Qur'an with him. Ibn `Abbās relates: "Allah's Messenger was the most generous of people, and he was at his most generous in Ramadān when Gabriel met with him. He would come to him every night in Ramadān and review the Qur'an with him. Allah's Messenger was more generous in charity than a nurturing wind sent from the sky." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2308)]

In the final year of the Prophet's life, the angel Gabriel reviewed the whole Qur'an with him twice. Therefore, Ramadān was a special time every year for the Prophet to study the Qur'an with the angel Gabriel. Each year, they would review what had been revealed up to that time. The Prophet would recite and the angel would listen. In the course of doing so, what Allah willed to remain part of the Qur'an would be confirmed, and what He decreed would not remain would be abrogated. The Qur'an speaks about this saying: "Allah effaces what He wills, and establishes (what He wills), and with Him is the source of the Book." [*Sūrah al-Ra'd: 39*]

Because of the Prophet's practice, scholars have determined that reading the entire Qur'an once or more times during Ramadān is a recommended act of devotion. This is why the Pious Predecessors used to devote a lot of time to the Qur'an in Ramadān. It is known that al-Zuhri from the start of the month would devote all of his time to either reading the Qur'an or providing food for the needy. Imam Mālik used to stop reading hadīth during Ramadān to devote all of his time to the Qur'an.

Things to Consider:

1. Some people think that finishing the Qur'an is a goal in and of itself. They recite as quickly as possible without thinking about its meanings and without any sense of humility and devotion in

their hearts. All that matters to them is competing their daily reading goal. This is not why the Qur'an was revealed. Allah says: "[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, (O Muhammad), that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding may receive admonition." [*Sūrah Sād*: 29]

We read how often some of the Pious Predecessors would read the Qur'an from cover to cover, and many of us feel inspired to emulate their behavior. However, it is a mistake to rush through it without taking pause to ponder on what it is telling us, or to recite it so fast that we mispronounce its words even if we are able to recite correctly. We should take a lesson from the illustrious Companion `Abd Allah b. `Umar. He spent eight years mastering *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, learning its meanings in depth. He certainly did not need that time to commit it to memory. Muslim children memorize the entire Qur'an in the course of a year. However, it was not enough for him to memorize a verse. He had to understand its meaning thoroughly, along with the legal rulings it contained. He needed to identify which verses were abrogated in their rulings and which ones were doing the abrogation. He needed to know which verses were general in meaning, and which ones had their meanings specified by other verses.

It is better to read the Qur'an alone, giving it your full attention, away from sounds and distractions. Prophet Muhammad said that among the seven kinds of people who will be blessed with the shade of Allah on the Day of Judgment will be: "someone who remembers Allah in private, his eyes flowing with tears." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (660) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1031)]

If we consider all the evidence that speaks about the blessings we get from reading the Qur'an, we find that these blessings are connected with three things: the time spent reading the Qur'an, the care and attention given to it, and the effect that the Qur'an has on us. This final consideration is the most important, and it depends on how well we reflect on the Qur'an and ponder its message. If we want to be moved by the Qur'an, we must come to it with open hearts and open minds. We have to be willing and ready to let the Qur'an change us.

2. Every Muslim, by virtue of knowing Allah and knowing that the Qur'an is His word, must show the Qur'an respect. It is a grave

sin for someone to deliberately mistreat or belittle Allah's Book. This behaviour is sometimes exhibited by people who hate Islam and want to prevent its spread. They act in accordance with their own tastes and bad manners, and their conduct only elevates the Qur'an's fame and dignity even more. It is the person who perpetrates the act who looks foolish and despicable. However, it is almost unbelievable to imagine such behaviour coming from a Muslim. It is the opposite of what belief in Islam dictates.

Believers are supposed to have respect and reverence for Allah's Book. This is why we are commanded to be in a state of ritual purity before we touch it. This is the opinion of all four Schools of Islamic Law, because Allah says: "Indeed, it is a noble Qur'an, in a book well-kept. No one touches it save those who are purified." [*Sūrah al-Wāqī'ah*: 77-79]

Also, Prophet Muhammad said: "No one should touch the Qur'an except in the state of ritual purity." [*Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān* (6559) and *Mustadrak al-Hākim* (1/552)]

This hadīth has a reasonably good chain of transmission, and it enjoys widespread scholarly acceptance. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr says: "It is well known and widely narrated to the point that its chain of transmission is not a concern." It also has numerous corroborating lines of narration.

How can some young students toss aside the Qur'an or their study portions when they finish their day's lessons? Indeed, students should not throw any of their books on the ground or toss them in an inappropriate place. Knowledge deserves more respect than that. The Qur'an, beyond that, deserves our reverence.

How can others see fit to jot down messages and write other inappropriate comments in the Qur'an? Some students have even been caught writing in the margins to send rude remarks to their fellow students, or to exchange love letters.

Muslim countries and their civil institutions need to take a firm stand on disrespecting the prophets and their Books, especially the Qur'an. They should condemn such behaviour in no uncertain terms. In many countries, abuse of faith principles are prohibited by law as a form of hate crime.

We must raise our children to love and revere the Qur'an, and to recite it with faith and feeling. It should not be seen as a chore or treated like school work whose utility is for passing the exam at the end of the term.

3. We should consider the practice of offering a supplication when we finish reading the Qur'an in its entirety. This is especially the case at the end of Ramadān in the Tarāwīh prayer. There is a lot of scholarly debate about this practice, with some saying it is a Sunnah practice and others dismissing it as an unfounded innovation.

We need to look at this question in greater detail. First, reading the Qur'an from beginning to end in Ramadān in the course of the nightly Tarāwīh prayer is a recommended practice. This is a point all the Islamic legal scholars agree on. Indeed, one of the reasons behind the Tarāwīh prayer is to provide an opportunity for the Muslim community to hear the entire Qur'an in Ramadān.

Second, it is the opinion of most scholars that offering the supplication upon completing the Qur'an is a recommended devotional act. This is the official stance of the Hanbalī school, as well as the view of the later Shāfi'ī and Hanafī scholars. They cite the hadīth related from al-'Irbād b. Sāriyah that reads: "Whoever reads the Qur'an from beginning to end will have a supplication answered." [*Mu'jam al-Tabarānī al-Kabīr* (647)] However, its chain of transmission has 'Abd al-Hamīd b. Sulaymān al-Khazā'ī as one of its narrators, and he is regarded as weak.

Some Hanafī scholars hold the view that the supplication is recommended outside of prayer, not inside of it. Some Mālikī scholars say that it is never prescribed as a devotional practice, arguing that the practice is an unfounded innovation not substantiated by any valid evidence.

It is an established fact, however, that the Prophet's Companion Anas b. Mālik used to offer a supplication whenever he completed reading the Qur'an from beginning to end. He would gather his family together, and beseech Allah to bless them all. [*Musannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah* (30038) and *Musnad al-Dārimī* (3474)]

It is also related from al-Hakam that Mujāhid and 'Abdah b. Abī Lubābah wrote to him: "We send this to you saying that we

wish to recite the Qur'an from beginning to end, because it is said that our supplications are answered upon completing a reading of the Qur'an." They got together and recited the Qur'an and then offered many supplications. [*Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah* (30038)]

As for offering such supplication inside of prayer after completing the Qur'an, like in the case of the Tarāwīh prayer or in the case of someone who recites the Qur'an in the Tahajjud prayer over the course of many nights, this is not an established practice. However, Ahmad b. Hanbal saw no problem with including such a supplication in the *qunūt* in the final Witr unit of Tarāwīh or Tahajjud, since the *qunūt* is a place in prayer where personal supplications are offered.

Prophet Muhammad prescribed the Witr prayer as a time for supplications. He taught his grandson al-Hasan to say:

O Allah! Guide me among those who are guided. Pardon me among those You pardon. Make me among those whom You turn to Yourself. Bless me in what You provide for me. Protect me from the harm in what You decree, for indeed You decree what You will and nothing is imposed upon You. No one whom You support is ever brought low. You are most blessed, exalted." [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (464) , *Sunan al-Nasā'ī* (1745)) and *Sunan Abi Dāwūd* (1425)]

Therefore, it is an established Sunnah to offer a supplication in the Witr prayer, either before or after bowing.

Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī was asked about the length of the *qunūt* in the Witr prayer. He said: "It should be as long as the time it takes to read the chapter in the Qur'an entitled *al-Infītār*."

When Ahmad b. Hanbal heard this, he said: "That is quite short," and suggested that a person could prolong it further.

When we compare how the Prophet and his Companions offered the *qunūt* in their prayers with how some of today's imams observe it, we find a stark difference. Some imams prolong the *qunūt* to the point where it taxes the worshippers and even bores them. They forget the spirit of supplication in which the *qunūt* is

supposed to be offered. This is wrong and can lead some people to dislike engaging in the worship of their Lord.

There is nothing wrong with prolonging the *qunūt* a little bit on the occasion of completing the Qur'an, and mentioning the Qur'an in our supplication, like saying: "O Allah! Bless us and elevate our spirits with the Qur'an. O Allah! Make us of those who read the Qur'an and attain Your special favour. You are the most merciful of all. Make our reading of the Qur'an intercede for us..."

There is a well-known supplication for completing the Qur'an that begins: "Allah has spoken truly; He who is All-Knowing and All-Powerful. Allah has spoken truly and no word is truer than His; Allah Almighty has spoken truly and conveyed His Message to His noble Prophet, and we are among those who bear witness to what Allah has said, and we deny nothing of what He has decreed and revealed...."

This is one of the supplications for completing the Qur'an that people are familiar with. Due to its widespread popularity, many people assume that it is from the Prophet's Sunnah. This is not the case. It is not related in the Sunnah at all. However, its content is generally good, and if an imam chooses to repeat this supplication as part of the *qunūt*, no one should make an objection to it. It does not warrant becoming a point of contention for the Muslim community. It is a small matter, since supplications are not fixed and the unity of the Muslims is a far more important concern.

At the same time, it is best for the imam to restrict the supplication to what is found in the Sunnah or at least has a precedent in the Sunnah. Stylized, affected, and ornamented speech should be avoided. The *qunūt* supplication is an act of worship which the imām and the congregation are all participating in together, and this should be kept in mind.

Some people, while offering a supplication upon completing the Qur'an, mention Heaven and Hell, the trials of the grave, the Resurrection, and the trials of the Day of Judgment. All of this is unnecessary in the context and inappropriate.

As we have already mentioned, the practice of offering a supplication after reading the Qur'an has been the topic of considerable scholarly debate. A balanced and moderate position is

always best, neither dismissing it outright nor endorsing it in very possible guise without reservation. This is not a question that warrants severity or inflexibility. Even if someone wishes to offer this supplication in a prayer other than Witr, they can do so. The Prophet often offered the *qunūt* supplication in the Morning Prayer, and he did so occasionally in the other daily prayers.

Some Rulings about Fasting

There are numerous rulings related to fasting, and to speak about all of them would take a very long time. However, it is possible to briefly discuss the most important rulings.

1. Determining the First Day of Ramadān:

The start of Ramadān is determined by either completing the month of Shaʿbān as thirty days or by seeing the first crescent moon for the new month. Prophet Muhammad said about sighting the crescent: “If you see it, then fast, and when you see it again [for the next month], stop fasting. If the sky is overcast, then complete the month of Shaʿbān as thirty days.” [*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (1909) and *Saḥīḥ Muslim* (1081)]

This means that Ramadān is determined by objective standards, not by guesswork. The Shāfiʿī jurist al-Qādī Husayn was approached by a man who said he had a dream wherein he saw the Prophet approach him and say that it was the first night of Ramadān. Al-Qādī Husayn replied: “What you claim to have seen in a dream is something the Prophet’s Companions used to look for when they were awake. The Prophet said to them: ‘If you see the moon, then fast, and when you see it again [for the next month], stop fasting’.”

It is also not allowed for a Muslim to fast the last day of Shaʿbān if the purpose in doing so is to use it as a precaution against the possibility of it being the first of Ramadān. If he or she does so for another reason, like to observe the recommended fasts on Mondays and Thursdays, then it is okay. This is because the Prophet said: “No one should fast on the last couple of days before Ramadān, except where a man fasts a regular fast and it happens to fall on that day.” [*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (1914) and *Saḥīḥ Muslim* (1082)]

2. The Intention to Fast

It is essential for the person who wishes to observe an obligatory fast to have the intention to do so before dawn, because the Prophet said: “Whoever does not have the intention to fast

before dawn has no fast [for that day].” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (730) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (2454)]

This is unnecessary for those who wish to offer a voluntary fast. They can decide to do so in the morning, as long as they have not already partaken of food or drink. This is in accordance with the Prophet’s practice. His wife `Ā’ishah relates to us that he would ask her in the morning if there was anything to eat. If she said “no”, he would say: “Then I shall fast today.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (1154)]

Regarding the requirement for having the intention to fast before dawn, what matters is that dawn has not yet arrived. It does not matter if the person has slept that night. Therefore, if a person goes to sleep not knowing whether it is the eve of the first of Ramadān and wakes up a little before dawn to learn that it is, then the person should resolve to fast on the spot.

Another thing to emphasise is that having an intention is something straightforward. There is nothing difficult or ambiguous about it. Some people misunderstand this and have misgivings whether or not they really intended to fast. Any Muslim who knows that Ramadān is starting and that they are going to fast the month already has the intention for the whole month. It is that simple.

3. The Pre-Dawn Meal

Prophet Muhammad ordered us to have something to eat and drink before dawn on the day of the fast. We should observe this practice, even by simply having a glass of water. He said: “Partake of a pre-dawn meal, for there are blessings in doing so.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1923) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1090)]

The Prophet also said: “The difference between our way of observing the fast and that of the Jews and Christians is our partaking of a pre-dawn meal.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (1096)]

4. Breaking the Fast at Sunset

It is preferable to hasten to break the fast when the Sun has set, just like it is preferable to take the pre-dawn meal as close to dawn as possible. The Prophet said: “People will remain in a good way as

long as they hasten to break the fast.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1957) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1098)]

He also said: “My people will remain in a good way as long as they hasten to break the fast and postpone the pre-dawn meal [to the latter part of the night].” [*Musnad Ahmad* (21312 and 21507)]

‘Ā’ishah was once asked who is better off, the one who hastens to break the fast and prays as soon as possible, or the one who delays breaking the fast and thereby delays offering the prayer a bit. She answered that the one who hastens to break the fast and prays earlier is better off, adding: “This is what Allah’s Messenger used to do.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (1099)]

The fast should be broken as soon as it is certain the Sun has completely set. The Prophet used to break his fast with fresh dates. If he did not find any, he would eat some dried dates. If no dates were available, he would break his fast with a few sips of water.

He would also say: “Thirst is gone, the blood is refreshed, and the reward is granted, by the grace of Allah.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (2357)]

This is the strongest narration regarding what the Prophet used to say upon breaking the fast. No other supplication has been authentically established specifically for breaking the fast. We can beseech Allah with any supplication we wish, asking Him to bless us with good in this world and the Hereafter.

5. Things that Nullify the Fast

The following things nullify the fast. If they occur during the day in Ramadān, the fast needs to be made up.

A. Eating, drinking and sexual intercourse. If a fasting person engages in any of these acts deliberately, without being under duress or acting in forgetfulness, then the fast is broken. This is established by the Qur’an and is a point of unanimous consensus among Muslim scholars.

Allah says: “[You may] have sexual relations with them and seek that which Allah has decreed for you, and eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black

thread [of night]. Then complete the fast until the sunset.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 187]

Whoever eats or drinks deliberately during the day in Ramadān must sincerely repent to Allah for the sin and make up the day of fasting at a later time. There is no prescribed way to expiate for it. If the fast was broken due to engaging in sexual intercourse, then there are four matters that must be observed:

1. The person must continue to refrain from eating and drinking for the remainder of the day. The fast was violated unlawfully, and this does not make eating and drinking before sunset permissible.
2. The person must repent for the grave sin that has been perpetrated.
3. The day has to be made up later on.
4. The person must atone by undertaking the prescribed expiation. This is to free a slave. If this cannot be done, then the person must fast for two consecutive months. If this is not possible, then the person must feed sixty poor people. If the person is truly incapable of any of these, then the expiation is not required.

B. Deliberate vomiting. This means vomiting by way of sticking one’s fingers down one’s throat, deliberately smelling a strong vile scent, or any other deliberate means. If a fasting person induces vomiting for any reason, then the fast is broken and has to be made up.

Involuntary vomiting, which the fasting person has no control over, does not break the fast. Prophet Muhammad said: “If a person is seized by a fit of vomiting, he does not have to repeat the fast, but if he deliberately induced the vomiting, he must make the fast up.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (720) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (2380)]

C. Menstruation and post-natal bleeding. It is a point of unanimous scholarly agreement that a woman who is menstruating or experiencing post-natal bleeding is not allowed to fast. ‘Ā’ishah

said: “When we experienced this, we were instructed to make up our fasts, but we were not told to make up our missed prayers.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (321) and *Sahīh Muslim* (335)]

These are the well-known ways that the fast is broken. Anything which is equivalent in meaning to one of them breaks the fast as well, like nutritive injections that sustain the body’s in lieu of food.

As for cupping, which is a medical treatment, I hold the view that it does not break the fast. This is the view of the majority of scholars. It was the view of many Companions, like `Ā’ishah, Abū Sa`īd al-Khudrī, Ibn Mas`ūd, Sa`d, and Umm Salamah. It was the view of many Successors as well, including `Urwah and Sa`īd b. Jubayr.

The hadīth of Abū Sa`īd al-Khudrī is cited as evidence to support the permissibility of cupping for a fasting person. He said: “The Prophet granted permission for a fasting person to sit for cupping.” [*Sunan al-Nasā’ī al-Kubrā* (3224, 3228) and *Sahīh Ibn Khuzaymah* (1967)]

The phrase “granted permission” indicates that cupping had previously been forbidden and then permission was granted later on. This is strong proof for those who argue that the final ruling on the question of cupping while fasting is that it is permissible and that the prohibition had been abrogated.

Then there is the hadīth where Anas was asked: “Did you all used to dislike cupping for a fasting person?” and he replied: “No, except because it made one weak.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1940)]

There is also the hadīth related by `Abd al-Rahmān b. Abī Laylā from one of the Companions that he said: “The Prophet prohibited cupping for a fasting person – and likewise prohibited fasting consecutive days in Ramadān without breaking the fast at night – as a kindness to his Companions, but he did not make it unlawful.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (2374)]

The “kindness” mentioned here alludes to the fact that cupping makes a person weak and makes fasting difficult, in the same way that fasting consecutive days without breaking the fast at night weakens a fasting person and makes the fast too difficult.

Therefore, the prohibition here is not one of legal proscription, but one of dislike. Cupping is merely discouraged.

As Ibn Taymiyah points out, questions of fasting are among those that all the Muslims need to know about. A number of Companions – even the Mothers of the Believers like `Ā'ishah and Umm Salamah – witnessed people undergoing the treatment of cupping during the fast but said nothing about it. Moreover, some of the Companions made it clear that cupping was only prohibited out of kindness to them.

This brings us to our question of a fasting person donating blood by modern means and the question of having blood drawn for the purpose of a blood test. Some scholars have compared these procedures to cupping, in consideration that they all entail the extraction of blood from the blood vessels in a manner that brings some harm to the individual and causes weakness.

Other scholars reject the idea that these procedures are comparable. They argue that cupping may have other aspects to it besides the mere drawing of blood that require the legal rulings for each to be different. This is the opinion that I tend towards.

Even if we hold the view that cupping breaks the patient's fast, we should limit this ruling to cupping itself and those procedures that are very similar to cupping. As for modern methods of taking blood samples, they do not break the patient's fast, nor the fast of a blood donor.

Indeed, many of those who hold the view that cupping breaks the fast concede that if a person suffers a small injury that results in the loss of some blood, his fast is not broken. Blood donations should be seen in the same light.

6. Concessions for Fasting People

Allah has blessed the Muslims with numerous concessions to remove hardships and difficulties from the people and make obeying Him easier. The following concessions are among those related to the fast:

A. If a person eats or drinks forgetfully, it does not break the fast. The fast remains intact and does not have to be made up.

Upon remembering, the person should desist immediately and continue to refrain from eating and drinking until sunset. This is the view of the majority of scholars, for Prophet Muhammad said: “Whoever forgets and eats or drinks while fasting, should continue to fast, for it is merely that Allah has given him the food and drink.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6669) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1155)]

Anyone who recalls the fast while there is food in their mouth should immediately spit it out. Likewise, it is the duty of anyone who sees a fasting person eating something in Ramadān to gently remind them that they are fasting, in the spirit of helping one another in good deeds.

B. If a person is in a state of major ritual impurity when dawn arrives, whether due to sexual intercourse or a wet dream, it has no consequences for the fast. The person should get up with the intention to fast and then bathe in order to offer the Morning Prayer. Both `Ā'ishah and Umm Salamah report that the Prophet used to start the day of fasting in a state of major ritual impurity. He would fast without a problem.

C. Brushing the teeth is permitted for a fasting person, even in the latter part of the day. Indeed, it is recommended for a fasting person just like it is recommended at other times. This matter will be discussed in greater detail in another chapter of this book.

D. Rinsing the mouth and nose with water is still part of the ablutions, but it should be engaged in moderately as a precaution against any water reaching the throat. The Prophet said: “Inhale deeply when rinsing the nose [for ablutions] except when you are fasting.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (788) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (2366)]

E. A person who has to travel during Ramadān can break the fast. It is preferable to break the fast if the journey makes fasting difficult, even if the person is travelling by plane.

The Late Night Prayer

Allah says: “O you [Muhammad] who are wrapped up in your garments, arise to pray at night except a little, half of it, or a little less or a little more, and recite the Qur’an in a slow, measured voice. Soon we shall bestow upon You a weighty message.” [*Sūrah al-Muzzammil*: 1-5]

Here Allah is calling His messenger to commune with Him at night through prayer and recitations and prepare himself for the weighty mission that his Lord is going to bestow upon him.

Allah also says: “Indeed, the righteous will be among gardens and springs, taking joy in what their Lord gives them, because, before then, they had lived a good life. They used to sleep but little of the night, and in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness.” [*Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt*: 14-18]

Prophet Muhammad said: “Apart from the obligatory daily prayers, the best of all prayers is the late night prayer.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (1163)]

‘Abd Allah b. Salām relates the following about when Prophet Muhammad first arrived in Madinah:

When Allah’s Messenger arrived in Madinah, people rushed to greet him, shouting that he had finally come. I was with them in order to get a look at him. When I saw his face, I knew it was not the face of a liar. The first thing he said was: “People! Spread the greeting of peace among yourselves, feed those in need, and pray at night when people are sleeping, and you will surely enter Paradise.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2485)]

This shows us that praying late at night has great virtue. It is the practice of the righteous and the way of the believers. It would be wise for each of us to have at least a small share in it.

This is especially true in the month of Ramadān. The Prophet said: “Whoever observes prayer in Ramadān with faith, seeking

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Allah's reward, will be forgiven all previous sins." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (37) and *Sahīh Muslim* (760)]

It is established that the Prophet led the Muslims in the late night prayer in Ramadān. `Ā'ishah tells us:

Allah's Messenger went out one night in the middle of the night to pray in the mosque. Some men prayed along with him. The next day, the people spoke about it. The next night, a larger number of people prayed with him. The next day, the people discussed it again, so on the third night the mosque was full and Allah's Messenger led them in prayer. On the fourth night, the mosque could not accommodate all of the people who came. Allah's Messenger did not come out that night. Some men there even called out for him to come and pray with them, but he did not come until it was time for the Morning Prayer. After leading them in the Morning Prayer, he turned to the people and said: "I was not heedless of your being here, but I feared that the prayer would be imposed on you as an obligation, and you would not be able to fulfil it." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (924) and *Sahīh Muslim* (761)]

Abu Dharr relates:

We fasted Ramadān along with Allah's Messenger and he did not lead us in prayer [late at night] until we reached the last seven days. On the first of these nights, he led us in prayer for a third of the night. On the following night he did not lead us in prayers at night. Then on the night after that, he led us in prayer for roughly half the night. I say: "Messenger of Allah! If you would only pray with us for the rest of this night!"

He replied: "Whoever follows the imam in prayer until he departs, it will count as if he prayed the entire night."

He did not lead us in prayer on the next night, but on the night that followed, he gathered his womenfolk and family together and the people gathered as well. Then he led us in

prayer until we would nearly miss the opportunity to have our predawn meal. Thereafter, he did not lead us in the late night prayer for the rest of the month. [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (806) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1375)]

Now, I would like to turn to some issues pertaining specifically to the congregational late night prayer in Ramadān, which is referred to as the Tarāwīh prayer.

1. The Number of Prayer Units

People have differed considerably on this issue, with suggestions ranging from eleven to forty-nine units, with a number of other opinions in between. We are, however, concerned about the practice of the Prophet and his Companions.

As for the Prophet, `Ā'ishah tells us: "Allah's Messenger never offered more than eleven units of prayer, neither in the month of Ramadān, nor at any other time of year." [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (2013) and *Sabīh Muslim* (738)] All the same, she also mentions that he used to prolong the units of prayer and offer them in a most excellent manner.

After the Prophet died, there was no longer any fear that the Tarāwīh prayer would be imposed as a religious obligation. Therefore, `Umar ordered the Muslims to offer the prayer as a single unified congregation. He did so after entering the mosque one night to find people praying individually or in small groups. He thought it would be good to bring them all together behind a single imam, so he ordered Ubayy b. Ka'b and Tamīm b. Aws al-Dārī to lead the community in the Tarāwīh prayers.

How many units did they prayer? There are two different narrations on the matter. One is that `Umar ordered them to lead the people in eleven units of prayer. [*al-Muwatta'* (251), *Musannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah* (7671), and *Sunan al-Nasā'ī al-Kubrā* (4687)] The other narration is that Ubayy b. Ka'b and Tamīm b. Aws al-Dārī led the people in twenty units. [*Musannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah* (7682, 7684)] However, some versions of this second narration mention twenty-one or twenty-three units. All three of these numbers – twenty,

twenty-one, and twenty-three – have been criticised as irregular by a number of hadīth specialists.

Others have attempted to reconcile these narrations. For instance, Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī writes: “It is possible to reconcile these narrations by understanding them to refer to different occasions. It could be that the difference is due to the length of recitation. When the recitation is prolonged, fewer units are offered, and vice-versa.”

In other words, the number of units varied with the varying needs of the congregation, like their strength or state of fatigue, or the length of recitation adopted for each unit. Another possibility is that the “twenty units” mentioned in some narrations do not take into account the unit of Witr prayer that always concludes the prayer, and which would be either one or three units long. This is the explanation preferred by al-Bayhaqī.

Another possibility is that ʿUmar ordered Ubayy b. Kaʿb and Tamīm b. Aws al-Dārī to lead the people in eleven units of prayer, but they decided on their own to perform twenty, twenty-one, and twenty-three units, in order to make the units shorter and reduce the amount of time the people had to stand. They did this to make the performance of prayer easy on the people. There is no disagreement in the narrations about ʿUmar that he instructed them to perform eleven units. The only discrepancy is found in the narrations of how Ubayy b. Kaʿb and Tamīm b. Aws al-Dārī actually led the prayer.

This seems to be the most likely explanation. Furthermore, the narrations that relate twenty-one units from Ubayy b. Kaʿb and Tamīm b. Aws al-Dārī are the strongest and most likely to reflect their actual practice. And Allah knows best.

In any case, it is wrong to think that the Tarāwīh prayer is supposed to be fixed at eleven units or any other number. There are two reasons for this. First, we have the narration where a desert dweller asked the Prophet about the late night prayer, and he replied: “Offer it in sets of two units each.” [*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (472) and *Saḥīḥ Muslim* (749)] That desert dweller did not know how to offer the late night prayer, nor did he know how many units the Prophet used to offer. The Prophet did not tell him how many sets of units to offer, and if that were essential information, then the

desert dweller would have needed to be informed of it. Since the Prophet did not specify a number to him, it means that the information was not essential to the performance of the late night prayer.

The second reason why we can assume the late night prayer has no fixed number of units is that voluntary prayers are allowed throughout the day and night except during those intervals of time when formal prayers are forbidden. If someone offers any number of prayers before noon, or in the early afternoon, or after sunset, or after the evening prayer, or in the morning after sunrise, this is perfectly acceptable. The same can be said for the voluntary prayers offered late at night.

Al-Qadī `Iyād writes in his commentary on *Sabīh Muslim*: “Everyone agrees that there is no minimum or maximum limit to how much prayer can be offered. The late night prayer is one of the extra prayers we are encouraged to offer. The more we do so, the greater the blessings we receive.”

2. Purifying the Heart

Our prayers, obligatory and voluntarily, were prescribed for our spiritual development and to purify our hearts. Our prayers are supposed to rid us of animosity, envy, anger, and base thoughts. They are supposed to develop in us a sense of brotherhood with our fellow worshippers. This is one of the primary objectives of our worship. When we pray, our hearts become perceptive and sensitive. Therefore, it contradicts with the wisdom of prayer to let the question of how many units to offer become a source of contention and animosity between people, especially when the question is an academic one that is open to research and a multiplicity of opinions. How can we take an act of worship Allah has enjoined upon us to soften our hearts and use it for the exact opposite purpose? All Muslims agree that Islam calls for bringing our hearts together and purifying our spirits. This is a clear duty upon us all. As for the late night prayer's number of units, this is something the Muslims disagree about, so we should not give this question more weight than a matter wherein the Muslims are unanimously agreed.

3. Seeking an Imam with a Beautiful Voice

Some people seek out an imam who has a melodious voice and go out of their way so they can follow that imam in prayer. There is nothing wrong with this in principle. Prophet Muhammad said: “Allah never listens to anything like He listens to a prophet with a beautiful voice reciting the Qur’an out loud.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (7482) and *Sahīh Muslim* (792)]

The beauty of the reciter’s voice no doubt has a soothing effect on the listener’s heart. It makes the listener more emotionally involved and more attentive to the meaning of what is being said. It also prevents the worshipper from growing weary or distracted.

The Prophet one night stopped and listened to Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī reciting the Qur’an. The next morning he went up to him and said: “O Abū Mūsā, If you had only seen me yesterday listening to you recite. You have indeed been blessed with one of the wind instrument’s of David.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (5048) and *Sahīh Muslim* (793)]

In every country where there are Muslims, we find certain mosques being filled to capacity with worshippers. There are imams who are followed in prayer by hundreds of thousands of people in countries like Morocco, Qatar, Kuwait, Egypt, and Libya.

All the same, it is preferable for people to pray in their local neighbourhood mosques, since this ensures that all the mosques are kept vital and helps bring people in the neighbourhood closer together.

Someone asked Ahmad b. Hanbal about seeking out a particular imam to follow in prayer. He replied: “Look and consider what is best for your heart, then act accordingly.”

Ahmad’s advice is to consider what brings the worshipper the greatest benefit, which will differ from person to person. This brings us to our next concern:

4. Flexibility

It is important to allow the people to have flexibility in these matters, since Islam is a religion of facilitation and not a religion of hardship. Abd Allah b. ‘Amr b. al-‘As relates that in Minā, during

the Farewell Pilgrimage, people came to the Prophet asking him about a number of different situations. One man came and said: “I did not realize what I was doing, and I shaved my head before sacrificing my animal.”

The Prophet replied: “Sacrifice the animal. There is no difficulty.”

Another man came and said: “I did not realize what I was doing, so I slaughtered my camel before stoning the Jamrah.”

The Prophet replied: “Stone it. There is no difficulty.” Whatever problems the people brought him concerning the rites of Hajj, he told them: “Do so. There is no difficulty.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (83) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1306)]

The Prophet liked for things to be easy on the people. This has been the approach of Muslim scholars throughout the ages. In the present age, we should continue with this approach. We should not make things unnecessarily difficult on the people concerning the Tarāwīh prayer or anything else. Part of this is for the imam to take the worshipers’ needs and abilities into consideration when leading them in prayer. This means not to impose on them too many units of prayer and not to stretch out the prayer for too long. Moderation is needed.

Ahmad b. Hanbal said: “When leading prayer during the month of Ramadān, the recitation should be light on the people. It should not be burdensome for them, especially when the nights are short. Everything depends on what the people are capable of.”

The leading scholars of Islam were concerned with avoiding difficulty. They wanted to encourage people to pray Tarāwīh by making it easy for them. They wanted the mosque to be inviting and they avoided making the people feel intimidated.

The people benefit greatly from the tarāwīh prayer. Their hearts feel awe and their eyes flow with tears. Their spirits are filled with faith and they turn to their Lord in devotion at this most blessed time of year. They have a sense of peace and feel the grace of Allah’s mercy upon them.

We ask Allah to bless us and all the Muslims with His favour during the month of Ramadān.

What Fasting Means to Us

Fasting is meaningful. It is prescribed for us so we can benefit in many ways. If we pause to contemplate on this matter, we will find much to enrich our thoughts and we will better appreciate the greatness of Islam, and that Allah wishes to benefit us through the worship that we perform. He has no need to impose hardships on us.

Once Prophet Muhammad saw an old man walking supported by his two children. He asked: “What is going on here?” They told him that they had sworn an oath to perform the pilgrimage on foot. The Prophet ordered them to ride and said: “Allah has no need for you to punish yourselves.” [*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (1865) and *Saḥīḥ Muslim* (1642)]

Indeed, Allah has no need for any of our deeds. The Prophet relates that Allah says: “You do not have the ability to bring Me any harm or any benefit.” [*Saḥīḥ Muslim* (2577)]

The purpose of our worship is to benefit and purify our souls. It also serves to develop our community life and instil within it a wholesome character and brotherly love. Fasting provides many benefits, among which are the following.

1. Love and Devotion to Our Lord

Fasting increases our devotion to Allah and strengthens our ability to obey Him in all aspects of our lives. It reminds us that we are His servants and that we serve no one else. This is why Allah has commanded us to eat on certain days, so that fasting on those days becomes a sinful act of disobedience. This is the case with the days of Eid.

We see this meaning in the state of *ihram* that pilgrims enter into when they undertake the Hajj. Pilgrims in this state are prohibited from engaging in a number of otherwise lawful acts, and even some acts that they would otherwise be obliged to carry out. This reminds them that they are Allah’s obedient servants, subject to His commands at all times.

This is a profound understanding to have. If we appreciate this fully when we engage in acts of worship, the effects of our worship would be felt in all aspects of our lives. Its impact would not be restricted to the time we are engaged in our ritual devotions. Rather, we would be prepared at all times to do what pleases Allah. If we slip up at any time, we would immediately hasten to seek Allah's forgiveness and make amends.

Strengthening our devotion and obedience to Allah are among the main reasons we engage in acts of worship. Some Muslims lose sight of this fact. They perform their acts of worship mechanically, without spiritual feeling. Their hearts are not into it. As a consequence, their worship has little impact on their lives, and it does not reflect positively on the way they treat others.

Our servitude to Allah is our truest freedom. We are only completely free when our commitment to Allah is at its most complete.

2. Expressing Our Inner Faith

Fasting is a hidden act. Only Allah knows for certain whether we are fasting. It is easy for a person not to fast but merely abstain from eating in the presence of others, so that they think he or she is fasting. Therefore, when we deny ourselves food and drink which we could easily have, it means that we really believe that Allah is watching us and that He is aware of what we do. If we think about it, this meaning is present in all our acts of worship. For instance, we need to be in a state of ritual purity for our prayers to be valid. If someone offered prayer in congregation without ablutions, no one else would know it. Likewise, if they made the motions of prayer without reciting the prescribed remembrances, no one else would be aware, because those remembrances are made silently. Our faith is only thing that brings us to perform these unseen aspects of prayer.

3. Strengthening Our Piety

Allah says: "O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it had been prescribed for those who came before you, that perchance you can be God-fearing." [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 183]

Here Allah explicitly states that we fast in order to develop our piety. When we fast, we abstain from the most essential acts of eating and drinking due to our hope of receiving Allah's blessings, which He has promised us. Every time we think about food, we are reminded of the fact that we are denying ourselves otherwise lawful food and drink for Allah's pleasure. Therefore, we will be less likely to commit sinful acts which Allah has forbidden us to commit at all times.

This is why Prophet Muhammad said: "If people do not abstain from falsehood in their words and deeds, Allah has no need of their abstaining from their food and drink." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1903)]

This does not mean that those people are free from the obligation to fast in Ramadān. It means that Allah only prescribed fasting for our benefit, in order to help us learn how to abandon falsehood in our words and deeds. Therefore, if we do not abandon falsehood, then we are not benefiting from our fasts. If fasting does not awaken our God-consciousness, then it has no real meaning for us.

This should be obvious to us. Fasting is prescribed for us in order to develop our piety and make us more God-fearing. It trains us to abstain from sin by making us stay away from our food and drink. If we can fast, we should be able to avoid backbiting, slander, and unethical behaviour.

4. Strengthening the Community

When people see everyone around them fasting, it develops their sense of community. This is one of the reasons it is easier to fast in Ramadān than at any other time of year. The participation of everyone else is a form of moral support which makes fasting easier for each individual. This is not the case when someone offers a voluntary fast on their own.

Fasting strengthens the Muslim community, including those societies where religious conviction is weak. This is why we rarely find any Muslims openly eating or drinking during Ramadān even in the most permissive of Muslim cultures.

5. Focusing Our Attentions on the Hereafter

When we fast, we give up doing things that we enjoy, seeking Allah's rewards and blessings. This means that we are taking account of the next life in the actions that we do. This focuses our hearts on our faith in the Unseen and the life of the Hereafter. It turns us away from worldly pleasures which tie us down to our present lives. At the same time, fasting benefits our health and gives our hearts the chance to rejoice in faith and obedience to Allah.

By contrast, people who are concerned only with material things find fasting to be nothing more than the denial of pleasure and a physical chore.

6. Fortifying Our Willpower

Fasting exercises our willpower and teaches us to be patient. This is why Ramadān is also referred to as "the month of patience." Also, Allah says: "Seek help in patience and in prayer. Indeed, it is a difficult thing except for those who are humble." [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 45] Some of the commentators on this verse have said that "patience" here refers to fasting.

This is one of the great benefits of fasting, since most of us are in constant need of developing our willpower. Success requires three things:

A. The desire to succeed. All of us have this to some degree. We all want to be prosperous. We all have dreams we want to realise.

B. The ability to achieve something. We all possess this as well. We all have our minds, our bodies, and talents that will bring us to success if we only employ them properly.

C. Willpower. Strengthening our willpower is a key ingredient of success. This applies equally to our worldly goals and our spiritual development. Willpower is what allows us to use our abilities to their optimal effect in the ways that will benefit us the most in this world and the next.

Fasting develops all three of these key ingredients of success, training us in self restraint, coping with difficulty, and taking charge of our bodies and our lives. These are the skills of successful people

who know how to use the gifts their Lord has blessed them with to achieve their dreams.

Patience is necessary for our spiritual salvation and our worldly success. It is indispensable for dealing with other people, so it is also a social necessity. It is one of the best personality traits, not only enabling us to realise our dreams, but allowing us to deal with the failures and pitfalls along the way. This applies to all aspects of life. A successful marriage requires patience. Raising children requires patience. It is necessary for maintaining friendships. We also need it when dealing with our enemies.

Allah says: “Repel evil with that which is better. Then, the one with whom you had shared animosity will become like a dear friend.” [*Sūrah Fussilat*: 24]

7. Reining in the Passions

Fasting helps keep our passions and desires at bay. Prophet Muhammad said: “Young people, those of you who are able to marry should do so. Those who can’t marry must fast, because it reduces desire.” [*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (5065) and *Saḥīḥ Muslim* (1400)]

This is proof that fasting reduces our innate urges and lusts. Some scholars have understood this hadīth in the context of another, where the Prophet said: “Satan circulates through the human body the way blood circulates.” [*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (2038) and *Saḥīḥ Muslim* (2175)] Some narrations of this hadīth conclude with the phrase: “So constrict his path of circulation through hunger and fasting.” However, this addition is false and cannot be substantiated.

However, even without the added phrase, the relevance for fasting is understood, since fasting brings about the described effect of cooling the blood’s passions. Moreover, since fasting is an act of worship that takes up all the daylight hours, it contributes psychologically to the ease with which we control our desires. Moreover, we know how easy it is to engage in extra worship throughout the night in Ramadān. We all find it easier to offer prayers and supplications at this time. This helps to distract us from our baser inclinations.

8. Providing Psychological and Physical Health Benefits

These benefits are numerous. Doctors inform us of healthy effects of fasting, as well as its use as an aid in weight control. These are, no doubt, secondary benefits of fasting, just like the similar health benefits we get from our physical exertions in prayer. We engage in fasting to worship our Lord, even if we receive no health benefits from it. Nevertheless, we know that Allah does not command us to do what brings us harm, unless there are other benefits that far outweigh that harm. Islam's teachings are meant to benefit us and protect us from harm.

A pure heart is the source of all human good. It is the secret to all positive change. Political and economic reform require sincerity and integrity. When people are free from base motives and truly seek what is best, Allah will be with them and bless their efforts with success. Allah says: "If they wish reconciliation, then Allah will bless them to be successful." [*Sūrah al-Nisā'*: 35] He also says: "Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves." [*Sūrah al-Ra'd*: 11]

We should not take a narrow view of what conduct is appropriate for a fasting person. We are supposed to refrain from all sins when we are fasting. Yes, we all know that we should not utter sinful words or engage in sinful deeds. However, just like stealing from your neighbour is sinful, so is stealing from public funds. Fraud, bribery, and deception are sinful, even if we excuse our deeds by arguing that we are securing our "rights". Likewise, stealing time from your employer by slacking at work is sinful, and claiming that fasting makes you tired does not make it right. Worst of all is when people in positions of authority use their influence to misappropriate the entitlements of those who are poor and weak. Fasting demands from us to refrain from all of that. We need to ask Allah to give us the strength to abstain from all sins, and we to ask Him to accept our fasts from us.

Fasting and Health

Allah says: “And if you fast, it is better for you.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 184] The verse’s meaning encompasses both this world and the next. Numerous medical studies have confirmed that fasting is indispensable for the body’s proper functioning. It is as necessary for the body as food and drink. It facilitates a purifying process that removes dead cells from the body.

Prophet Muhammad said: “Fasting is a shield.” [*Sahīb al-Bukhārī* (1894) and *Sahīb Muslim* (1151)] It protects us from spiritual, emotional, and physical maladies. It has incalculable benefits, many of which relate to our physical health, especially the removal of toxins from the system. This is, of course, if the fasting person eats sensibly at night after breaking the fast. Fasting gives the digestive system a chance to rest and restore itself.

Fasting is also a form of spiritual and natural healing. It benefits the heart and body as long as the fasting person acts as he or she should, observing all of the Islamic etiquettes and behaving sensibly. Fasting means to avoid food and drink, which brings many health benefits, but its objectives are more far-reaching. It brings the heart and mind together in focusing on Allah and strengthens our love for our Lord and our obedience.

Fasting is a form of worship, and its reward comes in the form of Allah’s pleasure and blessings in the Hereafter, as well as spiritual growth. At the same time, it is from Allah’s wisdom and mercy that He enjoins upon us what will benefit us in this world as well, by making it mean to improve our physical health.

Fasting fortifies our bodies and our spirits in the following ways:

1. It gives the body a rest, allowing it to repair and rejuvenate itself.

2. The absorption of material remaining in the intestines comes to a halt, which expedites its elimination. This is important, because food materials that remain in the intestines too long can produce poisons. Fasting is also the only effective way for the body to rid itself of toxins that come from the surrounding environment.

3. Fasting restores the digestive system to its full potential, especially its role in purifying the body. This regulates the levels of the various constituents of blood and other bodily fluids. This is why it is necessary for the patient to be fasting for many blood and spit tests. If there is any discrepancy in the normal fasting level of certain constituents, it can indicate a medical problem.

4. Fasting allows the body to eliminate excess deposits and build-ups from sick bodily tissues.

5. Fasting rejuvenates cells and tissues. Scientific studies have shown that fasting can actually restore the body's youth.

6. Fasting improves the body's energy efficiency and helps to regulate the metabolism.

7. Fasting improves digestive functioning and nutrient absorption, allowing it to compensate for nutritional imbalances.

8. Fasting strengthens the mind and improves learning. An old saying goes: "Weight gain is the mind's loss."

9. Fasting affects the skin and complexion in many positive ways. It provides many of the same beautifying and cleansing effects that one gets from using quality beauty ointments.

10. Fasting is an effective, less dangerous cure for many of the health problems of the modern world. It reduces the strain on the circulatory system and lowers blood lipid and uric acid levels, which helps to prevent arteriosclerosis, heart disease, and gout.

After the body cleanses itself of toxins and gets the restorative rest it needs, it then moves on to the task of repairing damaged tissues and compensating for the deficiencies that resulted from the impaired functioning of those tissues. The rest and detoxification that fasting provides helps get the body back to its optimal condition so that it has the strength to cope with the stresses that beset it.

All of this is in addition to the psychological effects that voluntarily depriving ourselves of food and drink have on us. Luqmān gave the following advice to his son: "My child, when the stomach is full, your mind slumbers, your judgement is dulled, and your limbs are lazy to engage in any acts of worship."

The famous scholar Sufyān al-Thawrī said: “By eating little, you are able to stay up in worship throughout the night.”

The great Mālikī jurist Sahnūn said: “Knowledge does not come to those who eat until they are full.”

Hunger has its benefits, especially when it is related to fasting as an act of devotion to Allah. Ten of these are the most important:

1. It purifies the heart, sharpens the instincts, and opens the mind. A full stomach weakens the mind and blinds the heart. The heart becomes too heavy to entertain new ideas and perceptions.

2. It makes the heart receptive to Allah’s remembrance. Even when we remember Allah with an attentive mind, we sometimes do not find comfort in it. It does not have the spiritual impact it is supposed to have. Our hearts are made more compassionate and sensitive by the hunger induced by fasting, which has a profound effect on our communion with our Lord.

3. It cultivates our sense of humility. It strips us of the vanity, hedonism and insolence that make us lazy and unjust, as well as forgetful of our Lord. Hunger makes us aware of how weak we are. It reminds us that our strength has its limits. We become more humble as a result.

4. It makes us recall Allah’s tests and the hardships that people face. Our hunger reminds us of those who are suffering. People whose bellies are full forget those who are hungry.

5. It weakens our sinful desires and helps us to overcome our baser selves. Our desires push us to commit sins, and our desires are fuelled by food. Therefore, reducing our intake of food weakens those desires. Our success deepens on self-control, while perdition is the consequence of giving in to our passions. Nothing brings people to ruin these days like harmful addictions. When people are addicted to something, they are willing to do anything to satisfy that addiction, even if it destroys them.

6. It helps us shake off our lethargy. When we eat too much, we become lazy and prone to sleep. This is why some of the Pious Predecessors used to say: “Do not eat and drink a lot. This will make you sit around a lot, and you will lose out on so much.”

We can waste our lives in sleeping and lazing about. That is a foolish, weak-hearted way to live. Our time on this Earth is our most precious possession. It is the capital that, through our worship, we invest in the Hereafter.

7. Eating less makes it easy for us to be constant in our religious devotions. We worship less when we eat too much. It takes time to eat all that food. Then it takes time to rest and digest it. Moreover, people who focus on eating can spend a lot of their time shopping for food and preparing it.

8. Eating less improves our health and wards off many diet-related diseases. When we are sick, it is difficult for us to engage in worship, and it preoccupies our time and energies. Being sick puts a strain on our thinking and our life activities. We turn our attentions to doctors and medical treatments.

9. It helps us economically. People today have begun spending considerable sums of money on luxury foods and they have become very finicky about what they are willing to eat. Being hungry helps us to adjust our perspective about food, and this brings us to the final benefit.

10. We learn to prefer the poor and the orphans over ourselves when it comes to our surplus food. What we give will return to us as blessings in the Hereafter.

Allah tells us: “And do good, as good has been done to you.” [*Sūrah al-Qasas*: 77]

And He says: “Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Allah does not love those who are excessive.” [*Sūrah al-Aʿrāf*: 31]

This verse gives us one of the cornerstones of preventive medicine, which is healthy eating. We should eat wholesome, nutritious food, and do so in moderation. We should avoid high-fat fast foods and other unhealthy choices, and strive to maintain a healthy body weight. Obesity has become a widespread problem, even among the youth.

The Prophet used to seek refuge with Allah from serious illness and beseech Him for health and well-being. We should likewise stress the importance of our health.

The Month of Generosity

Generosity is a noble trait, and Allah loves those who possess it. It is sign of strength and true human feeling, and it wins the hearts of the people. Generosity comes in many forms. People can be generous with their wealth, their time, their knowledge, and their labour.

Ten Levels of Generosity

1. Being generous with your life. This is where a person lays down their life in the defence and protection of others. This is the greatest expression of generosity there is.

2. Being generous in a position of leadership. Leadership is a test. A generous leader puts the people first and strives for their welfare at all times. If the interests of the people are best served by stepping down and surrendering power to someone else, then that is what a generous leader must do.

3. Being generous with your wealth. We work hard to earn, save, and protect our wealth. When we give it to the poor, the destitute, or someone who asks for charity, knowing that they did not work to earn it, we achieve a high level of honour. Allah says: “Those who are saved from the covetousness of their souls, they are the successful ones.” [*Sūrah al-Hashr*: 9]

4. Being generous with you knowledge by imparting it. This is better than being generous with wealth. Knowledge is nobler than money, since wealth disappears when it is used while knowledge persists. When someone asks a question, a generous answer is one which is complete and comprehensive. It is not generous to disclose only the minimum amount of information possible.

5. Being generous with your status. This is to use your influence to help others fulfil their needs, like when you mediate with an official on someone else’s behalf.

6. Being generous with your physical strength. Prophet Muhammad said: “Charity is due upon every joint of the body for every day the Sun rises. Brokering justice between two people is

charity. Helping a man with his animal and lifting his luggage upon it is charity. A kind word is charity. Every step that you take towards the mosque is charity, and removing harmful things from the road is charity.” [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (2989) and *Sabīh Muslim* (1009)]

7. Being generous with your honour. This is where you pardon those who transgress against your honour, rather than demanding redress. This is the charity of a pure heart.

Prophet Muhammad once said: “Can’t anyone of you be like Abū Damdam?”

The Companions asked, “Who is Abu Damdam, O Messenger of Allah?”

He replied, “When he gets up in the morning, he says, ‘O Allah, I offer my honour and life to You?’ On account of this, he would not abuse those who abused him, nor would he wrong those who wronged him, nor hit those who hit him.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (4887)]

8. Being generous by showing patience and overlooking others’ wrongs. This is more rewarding for the giver than giving money. Only the best and strongest of people are capable of it. Those of us who are unable to be generous with money must strive to be generous in this way, for it bears its fruit for the giver in this world as well as the next.

Allah describes the righteous as those: “who spend [freely] during ease and hardship and who restrain anger and who pardon the people, and Allah loves those who do good.” [*Sūrah Āl `imrān*: 134]

He also says: “Whoever waives redress out of charity, it is an expiation for him.” [*Sūrah al-Mā'idah*: 45]

9. Being generous through good behaviour. Being friendly, well mannered and kind is a form of charity. Those who are generous in this way can attain the reward of one who spends the day fasting and the night standing in prayer. The benefits of good manners are innumerable. None of us, not even the wealthiest, can spread their wealth among all people. However, we can all share our good behaviour with everyone.

10. Being generous by not coveting what others have. This means you do not look longingly at what people possess and fixate on it. `Abd Allah b Mubārak said that this quality is better than spending from your wealth.

Generosity is one of Allah's noble attributes. One of his names is al-Jawād, the Most-Generous.

Prophet Muhammad said: "Allah is magnanimous and generous, and He loves those who are magnanimous and generous. He loves exemplary manners and hates bad behaviour." [*Mustadrak al-Hākim* (1/48)]

Prophet Muhammad informed us that Allah says: "O My servants! If the first of you and the last of you, every human being and jinni from among you, gathered together in one place and beseeched me, and I gave every person what they asked for, it would not diminish what is with Me, any more than dipping a pin in the ocean and taking it out again diminishes the water in the ocean." [*Sahīh Muslim* (2577)]

Ibn `Abbās tells us: "Allah's Messenger was the most generous of people, and he was at his most generous in Ramadān when Gabriel met with him. He would come to him every night in Ramadān and review the Qur'an with him. Allah's Messenger was more generous in charity than a nurturing wind sent from the sky." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2308)]

Safwān b. Umayyah said: "I swear by Allah that Allah's Messenger gave me all that he gave me when he was the person I hated more than anyone else. He continued to give to me until he became the person I love the most." [*Sahīh Muslim* (2313)]

The Prophet had given Safwān a valley full of camels, to which Safwān had said: "I bear witness that only someone with the heart of a prophet would be willing to give such a gift."

The Prophet's generosity was all for Allah's sake. He sought his Lord's pleasure alone. He gave charity to the poor and needy, and spent money to win the hearts of people to Islam, when he would often give gifts that kings would find difficult to offer, all the while living the life of an extremely poor person himself. He would sometimes go a month or two without a hearth fire in his house. He sometimes had to tie a stone around his waist to relieve the hunger

he was suffering from. Once, his daughter Fatimah complained to him that she wanted a servant to help with the housework. He told her to seek help in the remembrance of Allah before going to sleep at night and explained: “I will not provide you with a servant and leave the people who are staying in the mosque with their stomachs turning in hunger.” [*Musnad Ahmad* (596, 838)]

Special Blessings for Being Generous in Ramadān

Generosity is especially blessed during the month of Ramadān. There are many reasons for this. For one thing, Ramadān is a blessed month where the rewards for all of our good deeds are multiplied. Beyond that, there is the fact that our generosity at this time helps those who are fasting and engaging in extra worship during this special month.

Prophet Muhammad said: “Whoever provides a fasting person food to break the fast will earn a reward equal to the reward of that fast, without the fasting person’s reward decreasing in the least.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (807) and *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (1746)]

The observance of fasting and charity at the same time is one of the ways to attain Paradise. The Prophet said: “In Paradise, there are chambers (whose walls are so transparent) that their outsides are visible from within, and their insides are visible from without.’ A Bedouin stood up and asked: “Who will these be for, O Messenger of Allah?’ The Prophet replied: “They are for those who say kind words, provide food (to the needy and poor), observe regular fasts, and stand in prayer at night when people are asleep.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (1984)]

The combination of fasting and charity is also a better way to expiate for sins, especially if it is accompanied by observing the late night prayer. Fasting is a shield from sin, and charity expiates for it.

The Prophet once said to Mu`adh b. Jabal: “Should I not guide you to the means to all that is good? Fasting is a shield. Charity extinguishes sinful deeds like water extinguishes fire. Then there is prayer in the depths of the night.” Then he recited from the Qur’an *Sūrah al-Sajdah* 16-17: “They forsake their beds to supplicate their Lord in fear and hopefulness, and they spend from what We have provided them. And no soul knows what what delights of the eye

are kept hidden [in reserve] for them as a reward for what they used to do.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2616) and *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (3973)]

Prophet Muhammad emphasized the importance of feeding the poor to expiate for sins by saying: “Protect yourself from the fire, even if you can only do so by providing someone with the flesh of half a date.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1417) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1016)]

Another way charity is extra blessed in Ramadān is in how it can compensate for shortcomings in our fasts.

Ibn `Umar would only break his fast in the company of the poor. If his family prevented him from doing so, he would not have dinner on that night. He used to give date sugar in charity and declare: “I heard Allah say: ‘You will not attain righteousness until you spend of that which you love, and whatever you spend, Allah is well aware of it.’” [*Sūrah Āl `Imrān*: 92] And Allah knows how I love sugar.”

Al-Shāfi`ī said: “I prefer for a man to be extra generous in Ramadān in emulation of the example Allah’s Messenger, and also in consideration of the people’s needs, since they are preoccupied by fasting and prayer from their livelihoods.”

Ibn Athīr said: “The greatest of deeds is to bring happiness to your fellow believers or pay off their debts or provide them with bread to eat.”

Some of the Prophet’s Companions said: “The most beloved people to Allah are those who provide the greatest benefit to others. The most beloved of deeds with Allah is to bring happiness to a Muslim, or relieve his distress, or pay off his debt, or dispel his hunger. It is dearer to me to walk with my fellow Muslim to fulfil a need than it is for me to observe a retreat in the mosque for a month.”

Prophet Muhammad said: “Those who hasten to help the widows and the poor are like those striving in Allah’s path or like those who pray all night and fast all day.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (5353) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2982)]

The Prophet also told us: “Once there was a dog circling around a well, almost dead of thirst. A prostitute from the Children of Israel saw this. She took off her slipper and used it to draw water

to give to the dog. For this deed, she attained Allah's forgiveness." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (3467) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2245)]

The Prophet said: "If a woman gives in charity from the household food without bringing about any harm, then she will receive the reward for what she has given, and her husband will receive the reward for what he had spent on it. The same applies to a trustee. In no respect does the one diminish the reward of the other." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1425) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1024)]

Jābir b. `Abd Allah relates: "When the Prophet died, Abū Bakr came with wealth provided by al-`Ulā' b. al-Hadramī and said: 'Whoever the Prophet owed money to, and whoever has a claim on him, they should come to us now'." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (2683) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2314)]

There are many forms our spending can take in Ramadān. We can pay our prescribed Zakāh during this month as well as giving voluntary charity. We can establish a charitable endowment during this auspicious time, where the original sum is retained and invested and the profits are used in charitable causes on an ongoing basis. Another form of charity is an interest-free loan which may help someone out of a crisis or get them on their feet. Ramadān is a good month to establish schools, training centres, and other beneficial institutions. It is a good time to begin sponsoring an orphan. It is a good time to make a pledge to support a charitable organization. The more enduring and long-lasting the act of charity is, the better. Prophet Muhammad said: "The best deeds are those which are observed with constancy, even if they are small." [*Sahīh Muslim* (2818)]

Fasting with the Prophet

There are people who die while they are still alive, making no mark on the world, and then there are those who have died on this Earth but continue to live in the blessings of their Lord. There are those who live on in the memories of the people, whose life stories are emulated and whose words of wisdom are quoted and taken as guidance. Allah's Messenger Muhammad is, in this respect, the most often-mentioned and most influential person in history. This is attested to by Muslim and non-Muslim historians, among them Michael Hart in his book *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*.

The Prophet's example of how to fast is the best, most complete, most blessed... and the easiest... example to follow.

The Prophet used to increase his portion of worship during the month of Ramadān and exert himself far more than at any other time of the year. This included his charity, prayer, recitation of the Qur'an, supplications, and remembrances, as well as observing spiritual retreats in the mosque.

There were a number of things the Prophet did as part of his observance of this month which are unique to him and not to be followed by others. One of these is how he sometimes fasted continuously from one day to the next without breaking his fast at night. He did this in order to devote every hour of the day and night to worship, but he prohibited his Companions from doing so, saying: "My situation is not like yours. I spend the night with my Lord who provides me with food and drink." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1963) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1103-1105)]

Otherwise, the Prophet used to hasten to break his fast at sunset and he encouraged his Companions to do the same. He would also delay his pre-dawn meal to the latest possible time and exhorted his followers to do likewise.

Anas b. Mālīk narrates that Allah's Messenger used to break his fast with fresh dates before going to prayer. When fresh dates were unavailable, he would break his fast with dried dates. When

dried dates were unavailable, he would take a few sips of water. [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (696) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (2356)]

It is natural to want to have something sweet after fasting all day. The liver, likewise, benefits greatly from the water we have after fasting.

He offered the following supplication upon breaking his fast: “Thirst is gone, the blood is refreshed, and the reward is granted, by the grace of Allah.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (2357)]

When the Prophet travelled in Ramadān, he sometimes broke his fast and sometimes observed it. He likewise gave his Companions the choice to fast or break their fasts.

When the Prophet was in a state of major ritual impurity (*janābah*) at the time of dawn, he would bathe, offer the Morning Prayer, and fast. The Prophet’s wife Umm Salamah was once asked what a man should do if he wakes up in such a state on the day on a fasting day after having sex with his wife the night before. She replied: “Allah’s Messenger used to wake up in a state of major ritual impurity, and not from a wet dream, and he would fast.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (714)]

Out of compassion for his followers, the Prophet’s guidance was that anything a person ate or drank forgetfully during the day would be overlooked. He said: “If a person forgets he is fasting and eats or drinks something, he should keep fasting, for it is only Allah that gave him the food and drink.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1933) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1155)]

It is not authentically related from the Prophet that he forbade the use of antimony in the eyes during the fast. He also used to brush his teeth with a tooth stick throughout the day.

The Prophet also observed fasts outside of Ramadān. ‘Ā’ishah tells us: “Allah’s Messenger used to fast so much that people would say he would never stop fasting. Then he would go without fasting for so long that people would say he would not resume doing so. I never saw Allah’s Messenger fast for an entire month other than Ramadān. Outside of Ramadān, he would fast the most during the month of Sha`bān.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1969) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1156)]

In the beginning, before fasting was prescribed during the month of Ramadān, the Prophet fasted on the Day of `Āshūrā'. This was when he had first arrived in Madinah and found that the Jews were observing a fast on this day. He asked them why they did so, and they told him: "This is a great day. On this day, Allah saved Moses and his people and drowned Pharaoh and his people. Moses fasted this day to show thanks, and we do so as well."

The Prophet then said: "We have more rights to Moses than you do." So he fasted on this day and ordered his Companions to do likewise. [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (2004) and *Sabīh Muslim* (1130)]

Al-Rubayyi' bint Mu'awwidh relates her experience of this event, saying: "On the morning of `Āshūrā', Allah's Messenger sent word to all the neighbourhoods of Madinah that anyone who was already fasting should continue to observe the fast and those who had not started the day fasting should observe the rest of the day in fasting. After that, we fasted on `Āshūrā' and had our children fast it as well. We would send our children to the mosque and make woollen toys for them. If one of them started crying for food, we would give him the toy to distract him until the time of breaking the fast." [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (2004) and *Sabīh Muslim* (1130)]

Then, when fasting the month of Ramadān was prescribed, the fast of `Āshūrā' became a Sunnah act of worship, so that people were free to observe it or not observe it as they wished.

He was easygoing about fasting outside of Ramadān and considerate towards the needs of his family. One morning, he entered his home and asked: "Do you have anything to eat?" When they said that nothing was ready, he said: "Then I am fasting." On another occasion, he was told: "We've been given some food as a gift, a dish made from dates and cottage cheese." He asked for it and ate it, commenting: "I started off this day fasting." [*Sabīh Muslim* (1154)]

He did not like people to single out Friday as a fasting day. He said: "No one should fast on Friday without also fasting either the day before or the day after." [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (1985) and *Sabīh Muslim* (1144)]

On the last ten days of Ramadān, the Prophet would observe a retreat in the mosque (*i'tikāf*). He did this every year, except for one

year when he made it up by observing *i`tikāf* the following month. In the final year of his life, he observed twenty days of *i`tikāf* in Ramadān. This is because the angel Gabriel used to review the Qur'an with him once every Ramadān. In the final year of his life, he reviewed it twice.

When the Prophet observed *i`tkāf*, he never left the mosque except to answer the call of nature. He had his bedding laid out in the mosque in the place where he was sitting.

The best guidance is that which Prophet Muhammad came with. We should therefore learn how the Prophet fasted and strive to emulate his example in our words, deeds, and manners. Those who follow his ways are most deserving of being resurrected in his company and of receiving his intercession on the Day of Judgement. May Allah bless us to follow His Prophet both outwardly and inwardly, in our words and our deeds, in our knowledge and our practices, and bless us to be in his company, for indeed they are the company of the righteous.

Our Supplications in Ramadān

To offer supplications (*du`ā`*) to Allah is to beseech Him for everything that concerns us in this world and the Hereafter. In doing so, we profess our dependency on Allah, recognize that we need Him, and reveal that we possess no strength or might of our own. It is the clearest expression of sincere faith.

Allah mentions supplications while speaking about the fast, eloquently bringing these two acts of worship together. Right in the middle of a long discussion on fasting, He says: “And when My servants ask you (O Muhammad) about Me, then surely I am near I answer the prayers of the suppliants when they beseech Me. So let them hear My call and let them trust in Me, in order that they may be led aright.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 186]

In this verse, Allah moves from addressing the believers in general about fasting to addressing the Prophet in particular, telling him to remind them of the devotion and sincerity they are supposed to cultivate through fasting, particularly that they should turn to Allah alone with their prayers and supplications.

Indeed, Allah is still addressing the believers in general. He does not say “Tell the believers I am near.” He replies to the question directly, saying “surely I am near.” Then he goes on to explain what this nearness means, that He answers the supplications of those who beseech Him. This addresses the matter the Prophet’s Companions were concerned about. The question they had originally posed to him was: “Is Allah near so we should commune with Him or far away so we should call out to Him?”

Another aspect of Allah’s nearness is that He knows everything about us, what we profess openly as well as our deepest secrets. He says: “Verily, We created the human being and We know what his soul whispers to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.” [*Sūrah Qāf*: 16]

Prophet Muhammad said: “Allah is angry with those who do not ask of Him.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (3373)]

He also said: “Supplication is the greatest act of worship.” [*Mustadrak al-Hākim* (1/491)]

Significantly, he said: “Supplication is essentially what worship is.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2969)]

In this way, the Prophet indicated that supplication is not just the best form of worship, but that it comprehends all other forms of worship. After making this statement, he recited the following verse of the Qur’an: “And your Lord said: Call upon me in supplication. I will answer you.” [*Sūrah Ghāfir*: 60]

He also said: “The stingiest of people are those who are stingy in greeting people with peace. The most incapable of all people are those who are incapable of beseeching Allah in supplication.” [*Sahīh Ibn Hibbān* (4498)]

He said: “Whenever any Muslim on Earth beseeches Allah in supplication, Allah will either give him what he asks for or remove from him an evil commensurate to what he asked for, as long as he does not ask for something sinful or ask to break ties of kinship.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (3573)]

The Prophet related to us that Allah says: “I am as My servant thinks of Me, and I am with him when he calls upon Me.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (2675)]

Etiquettes of Supplication

There are many etiquettes that we should observe when we beseech Allah. We should be vigilant to learn them and put them into practice, since our supplications will be more likely to be answered.

1. Seeking Out Special Times and Circumstances. Some of the preferential times when supplications are more likely to be accepted are as follows:

A. The last part of the night. Prophet Muhammad said: “The Lord is closest to His servants in the late watches of the night. If you can be among those remembering Allah at this time, then do so.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (3579)]

He also said: “There is an hour during the night that if a Muslim asks Allah for anything good, He will grant it to him.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (757)] In one narration, it continues: “...and this hour occurs every night.” [*Musnad Ahmad* (14746)]

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B. When prostrating in prayer. The Prophet said: “As for when you are prostrating, exert yourself in beseeching Allah, for it is likely your supplications will be answered.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (479)]

C. When the call to prayer is made. The Prophet said: “When the call to prayer is made, the gates of heaven are opened and supplications are answered.” [*Musnad Ahmad* (14689)]

D. Between the first and second calls to prayer. The Prophet said: “No supplication is rejected between the first and second calls to prayer.” He also said: “Supplications between the first and second calls to prayer are answered, so beseech Him at this time.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (521) and *Sunan al-Nasā’ī al-Kubrā* (9897)]

E. The last hour before sunset on Friday. Allah’s Messenger said: “There are twelve hours during the day on Friday. During one of these hours, every Muslim who asks Allah for something will be granted it. Seek it during the last hour before sunset.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1047) and *Sunan al-Nasā’ī* (1389)]

Among the special circumstances where supplications are answered are the following:

A. Beseeching Allah on behalf of someone else in secret. The Prophet said: “When A Muslim makes a supplication for his brother secretly, it is answered. There is an angel delegated to stand at his head, and every time he asks for something good for his brother, the angel says: “*Āmīn*, and for you what is just as good.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (2733)]

B. To go to sleep upon the remembrance of Allah. The Prophet said: “If any Muslim goes to sleep in a state of purity upon the remembrance of Allah, and then wakes up at night and asks Allah for something good in this world or the next, Allah will grant it.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (5042) and *Sunan al-Nasā’ī* (1389)]

C. While travelling. The Prophet said: “Three supplications are answered, without a doubt. They are: The supplication of a parent, that of a traveller, and that of someone who suffers an injustice.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1536), *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (1905, 3448) and *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (3862)]

D. While fasting. The Prophet said: “There are three people whose supplications are never rejected: a fasting person up until the

time of breaking the fast, a just ruler, and the person who has suffered an injustice.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (3598)]

ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀs, the illustrious Companion, used to gather his children and family together at the time of breaking the fast and beseech Allah.

2. Facing the Qiblah and Raising One’s Hands. ʿAbd Allah b. Zayd relates: “The Prophet went out to the prayer area to beseech Allah for rain. Then he supplicated and appealed to Allah for rain. Then he turned and faced the Qiblah and turned his garment inside out...” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6343)]

The Prophet faced the Kaʿbah when he invoked Allah in supplication against the tribe of Quraysh. [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (3960)]

The Prophet said: “Your Lord – blessed and elevated He is – is shy and generous. He is shy from His servant to raise his hands to Him and turn them away empty and disappointed.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (3556), *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1488) and *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (3865)]

Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī relates, describing a supplication of the Prophet: “...then he raised his hands and I could see the whiteness of his armpits.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (4323) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2498)]

3. Supplicating in a Soft but Audible Voice. Allah says: “And do not recite too loudly in your prayer or too quietly, but seek between that an [intermediate] way.” [*Sūrah al-Isrāʾ*: 110]

ʿĀʾishah said that this verse is referring to supplications. [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6327) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2447)]

Abū Mūsā relates: “We were with the Prophet when the people began extolling the greatness of Allah in a loud voice. So the Prophet said: ‘O people! Calm your voices. You are not calling upon one who is deaf or absent. Indeed, you are calling upon the One who hears and is nearby, and He is with you’.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (2992) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2704)]

4. Refraining from Transgressing in Supplication. Allah says: “Call upon your Lord with humility and in private, for indeed Allah loves not those who transgress beyond bounds.” [*Sūrah al-Aʿrāf*: 55]

Transgressions in supplication would include supplications to hasten on Allah’s punishment, asking for things which are patently

impossible according to the laws of nature, or which violate Islamic teachings, and supplicating for sinful things.

5. Being Submissive and Humble. We must show humility and subservience to Allah when we supplicate to Him, with hope and fear in our hearts. Allah says about His Prophets: “Indeed they used to hasten to good deeds and supplicate to Us in hope and fear, and they were humble before Us.” [*Sūrah al-Anbiyā’*: 90]

6. Being Assertive and Straightforward in Asking, and Confident that Allah will Answer. Prophet Muhammad said: “Ask Allah being certain that He will answer, and know that Allah will not answer the supplications of a heart which is distracted and not serious.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (3479)]

He also said: “None of you should say ‘O Allah! Forgive me if You will. O Allah! Have mercy upon me if You will.’ Be assertive in what you ask, since there is no compelling Him.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6339) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2679)]

7. Being Persistent and Repeating the Supplication Three Times. Ibn Mas`ūd relates that when the Prophet supplicated or asked Allah for something, he would repeat it thrice.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (1794)]

The Prophet said: “If one of you asks Allah for something, then do so often, because you are asking none other than your Lord.” [*Sahīh Ibn Hibbān* (889)]

8. Praising Allah before Supplicating and Invoking Peace upon the Prophet at the End. Allah’s Messenger was once sitting in the mosque when he a man came in and made his prayers. While supplicating, the man said said: “O Allah! Forgive me and have mercy upon me!”

Allah’s Messenger said: “You are being hasty, O man in prayer. If you pray and then sit, praise Allah as He should be praised, then seek Allah’s blessings upon me, then supplicate to Allah with what you wish.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (3476) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1481)]

9. Being Penitent, Making Amends, and Turning to Allah with a Full Heart. This is the inner etiquette of supplication. It is the most important and direct factor in our supplications being answered.

ʿUmar b. al-Khattāb said: “I do not worry about my supplications being answered; I worry about my supplications themselves. If my supplication is heartfelt, then its answer comes with it.”

Abū al-Dardā’ advised: “Beseech Allah in times of prosperity. Perhaps Allah will answer you in times of adversity.”

He also said: “Be constant in your supplications. Those who knock on the door often are more likely to have it opened to them.”

10. Avoiding Haste. Prophet Muhammad said: “Your supplications will be answered except for those who get impatient and say: ‘I asked Allah but he did not answer me’.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6340) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2735)]

We must realise that beseeching Allah in supplication is an act of worship, and the answer to our supplication might be the acceptance of that worship with a great reward in the Hereafter. It may be that Allah wants us to remain in this state of devotion for a while longer for our own spiritual benefit, or He postpones answering with what we want because He knows that doing so is best for us. He may also answer our supplication by removing a hardship that would otherwise have befallen us.

Mistakes We Make in Our Supplications

1. Invoking a Supplication against Ourselves, Our Family, or Our Wealth. The Prophet said: “Never beseech Allah against yourselves, your children, or your wealth, lest you do in an hour where a petition is granted and you will be answered.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (3009)]

It is startling how that a lot of parents are quick to invoke supplications against their children. This is a grave error. For one thing, it might be answered. It also has a bad effect on the psychological wellbeing of the children to hear their parents saying such things, especially since children think their parents are making these supplications in earnest and believe that their parents really want them to meet with failure or misfortune. It can actually cause a child to expect failure and lose hope.

2. Raising the Voice. Allah says: “And do not recite too loudly in your prayer or too quietly, but seek between that an [intermediate] way.” [*Sūrah al-Isrā’*: 110]

3. Rhyming. Some people are in the habit of offering supplications with rhyming phrases, and there are those who take this to an extreme. This habit began early on, provoking Ibn `Abbās to caution: “Avoid employing rhyming phrases in your supplications. During the time of the Prophet and his Companions, they never did so.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6337)]

4. Transgression and Excess. This includes asking for things which are patently impossible according to the laws of nature or which violate Islamic teachings. It also includes supplicating for sinful things and for cutting ties of kinship. Another form of excess is to prolong a supplication in an affected manner, raising the voice, and behaving with poor decorum when speaking to Allah.

Collective Supplications

When the imam leads the people in supplications during prayer in Ramadān, certain things should be considered. For one thing, the best supplications are those which are comprehensive in meaning, the way the Prophet’s supplications were. Extraneous details, lists of people by name, and other unnecessary ways of prolonging the supplication are just excessive.

The imam should beseech Allah for the general welfare of the believers, matters in which the congregation all have an equal interest. Matters of personal interest and controversies should be avoided. Such things can cause members of the congregation to turn away with their hearts, if not their bodies.

It is best to beseech Allah for guidance. This supplication encompasses all humanity. Once someone asked the Prophet to invoke a supplication against the tribe of Daws which had acted with hostility towards the Muslims. The Prophet turned, faced the qiblah, raised his hands, and said: “O Allah! Guide the people of Daws and bring them to us. O Allah! Guide the people of Daws and bring them to us.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (2937) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2524)]

On another occasion, someone asked him to invoke a supplication against the pagans. He replied: “I was not sent to curse people. I was sent as a mercy.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (2599)]

This shows us that it is unlawful to beseech Allah against the unbelievers in general. We should beseech Him to guide them. We can only invoke Allah in supplication against those who aggress against us and oppress us.

Supplication is a form of worship that can bring people’s hearts together.

The Pious Predecessors in Ramadān

We should look to the example of the Prophet, his Companions, and the earliest generation of Muslims if we want to get the maximum benefit from this blessed month. He said: “The best of my Ummah would be those of the generation nearest to mine. Then those nearest to them, then those nearest to them.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (2652) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2533)]

We will look at some of the thing Pious Predecessors used to pay extra attention to during the month of Ramadān:

Reading the Qur’an

Allah says: “The month of Ramadān is that in which the Qur’an was revealed.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 185] For this reason, we find that the Pious Predecessors used to increase their recitation of the Qur’an in Ramadān. Ibrāhīm al-Nakha’ī tells us: “Al-Aswad b. Yazīd used to complete reading the entire Qurān every two nights in Ramadān. He would sleep between the Sunset and Night Prayers. Outside of Ramadān, he would complete reading the Qur’an every six nights.”

‘Abd al-Malik b. Abī Sulaymān tells us that Sa’īd b. Jubayr would also complete a reading of the Qur’an every two nights in Ramadān.

It is also mentioned that al-Walīd used to normally complete the Qur’an every three nights, but in the month of Ramadān, he would read it in its entirety seventeen times.

Salām b. Abī Mutī’ informs us that Qatādah used to normally take seven days to read the Qur’an, but in Ramadān he would take three days to do so. Indeed, during the last ten nights of Ramadān, he would read the entire Qur’an every night.

Al-Qāsim b. ‘Alī describes his father – Ibn ‘Asākir, the famed author of *The History of Damascus* – as follows: “He used to always observe his prayers in congregation and was constant in the recitation of the Qur’an. He would always complete a reading of the

entire Qur'an by Friday. However, in Ramadān, he would do so every day and retreat to the eastern minaret of the mosque."

Al-Dhahabī writes the following about Abū Barakāt Hibah Allah b. Mahfūz: "He learned Islamic Law and read the Qur'an. He was known for his charity and his good deeds. In the month of Ramadān, he would read the Qur'an thirty times."

Standing for Prayer in the Middle of the Night

Al-Sā'ib b. Yazīd relates: "Umar b. al-Khattāb ordered Ubayy b. Ka'b and Tamīm al-Dārī to lead the people in prayer in Ramadān. They would each read hundreds of verses at a go, until we had to support ourselves with canes due to the length of time we had to stand. We would only finish praying close to the time of the Morning Prayer." [*Musannaf 'Abd al-Razzāq* (7730)]

'Abd Allah, the son of Abū Bakr, relates that he heard his father say: "By the time we finished our prayers in Ramadān, the servants would have to rush to prepare food in fear of the Morning Prayer coming in." [*al-Muwatta'* (254)]

'Abd al-Rahmāb b. Hurmuz tells us: "The reciters (leading the prayers) would complete the reading of *Sūrah al-Baqarah* in eight units of prayer. When the reciters took twelve units of prayer to complete it, the people regarded it as if the reciters were making things easy for them." [*Musannaf 'Abd al-Razzāq* (7734) and *Sunan al-Bayhaqī* (4401)]

Nāfi' relates that Ibn 'Umar used to pray in his house during the month of Ramadān. When the people departed from the mosque, he would go off to the Prophet's Mosque, taking a flask of water with him. He would not leave the mosque again until after the Morning Prayer. [*Sunan al-Bayhaqī* (4384)] 'Imrān b. Hudayr tells us that Abū Mijlaz would lead the prayers in Ramadān for the people in his neighborhood. He would recite the Qur'an in full in prayer in the course of seven days. [*Musannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah* (7677)]

Giving Generously in Charity

Ibn 'Abbās says: "Allah's Messenger was the most generous of all people in doing good, and he was at his most generous during

the month of Ramadān. Gabriel used to meet with him every year throughout the month of Ramadān, so the Prophet could recite the Qur'an to him. Whenever Gabriel met with him, he became more generous than a beneficial breeze." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1902) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2308)]

Al-Muhallab makes the following observation about this hadīth:

This shows the blessings of good works and that engaging in some good deeds opens the door to the performance of others. The practice of doing some good deeds assists one in further good works. We can see here that the blessings of fasting and of meeting Gabriel increased the Prophet's generosity and charity, so much so that he became more generous than a beneficial breeze.

Al-Zayn b. al-Munīr explains the comparison with a "beneficial breeze" as follows: "His charity and good treatment for those who are poor and needy - as well as for those who are well-off and possess sufficient means - is as general as the relief brought by a beneficial breeze."

Al-Shāfi'ī said: "It is liked for a person to increase his charity in the month of Ramadān. This is following the Prophet's example. It is also in consideration of the people's needs and their welfare, since so many of them are distracted from earning their livelihood due to their preoccupation with fasting and prayer."

Ibn 'Umar used to never break his fast except in the company of the poor. Whenever someone came to him while he was eating and begged him for something, Ibn 'Umar would take from his food what he deemed to be his rightful share and then he would stand up and leave the rest of the food for that person. He would then take what was in his hand and give it to his family, so that when he woke up the next morning to resume his fast, he would not have eaten anything the night before.

Yūnus b. Yazīd tells us that during the month of Ramadān, Ibn Shihāb would engage in nothing besides reciting the Qur'an and providing food for the poor.

Hammād b. Abī Sulaymān would take it upon himself to provide food for five hundred people to break their fast with during the month of Ramadān. Then, on the day of Eid, he would give each of those people one hundred pieces of silver.

Safeguarding the Tongue

Abū Hurayrah relates that the Prophet said: “Whoever does not abandon false speech and acting falsely, then Allah has no need of his abandoning food and drink.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1903)]

Al-Muhallab makes the following observation about this hadīth:

This shows that fasting entails refraining from obscene and false speech just like it entails refraining from food and drink. A person who engages in false or obscene speech detracts from the value of his fast. He exposes himself to his Lord’s displeasure and to the possibility of his fast not being accepted.

The Prophet said: “If one of you starts off the day fasting, he should avoid obscene speech and ignorant behavior. If someone abuses him or starts to fight with him, he should reply by saying: ‘I am fasting. I am fasting’.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (1151)]

Al-Mazarī makes the following observation about why this hadīth recommends us to inform the abusive person that we are fasting:

It is possible that the person is recommended to say “I am fasting, I am fasting” merely to remind himself, so that he refrains from getting involved in the exchange of insults. ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb said: “One does not merely fast from food and drink, but also from lying, from falsehood, from vain talk, and from swearing.” [*Musannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah* (8882)]

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‘Alī b. Abī Tālib said: “Fasting is not to leave off food and drink, but rather to leave off lying, falsehood, and vain talk.” [*Musannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah* (8884)]

Talq b. Qays tells us that Abū Dharr said: “When you fast, then be on your guard as much as possible.” As for Talq, when he fasted, he only emerged from his home in order to go to the mosque for prayers. [*Musannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah* (8878)]

Jābir b. ‘Abd Allah said: “When you fast, your hearing, your vision, and your tongue should also fast – by avoiding lies and sins. You should not abuse your servant. You should maintain your composure and dignity on the day that you fast. Do not make your fasting day the same as your normal day.” [*Musannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah* (8880)]

‘Atā’ tells us that Abū Hurayrah said: “When you fast, do not act in an ignorant manner and do not insult people. If someone acts ignorantly towards you, say: ‘I am fasting’.” [*Musannaf ‘Abd al-Raḥḥāq* (7456)]

Mujāhid said: “If you avoid two things, then your fast will be alright. You must avoid backbiting and lying.”

Abū al-‘Āliyah said: “A fasting person is engaged in worship as long as he does not backbite someone.”

Mistakes to Avoid in Ramadān

Muslims make a number of mistakes during this auspicious month. These mistakes vary from country to country and from culture to culture, and there are many reasons why they happen. Sometimes they can be attributed to local customs and traditions. Sometimes they occur because of a misapplication of Islamic Law. At other times, the reason for the mistake is the desire to express happiness and joy during this blessed month. There are times when simple ignorance is to blame. Whatever the reason, the outcome is the same: a violation of Islamic teachings in a matter of worship. This is serious, since matters of worship in Islam are established and defined by the sacred texts.

The Prophet said: “Whoever introduces something new into this matter of ours will have it rejected.” [*Sahīh al-Bukharī* (2697) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1718)]

Some of the mistakes people make in Ramadān are serious enough to be violations of Islamic Law, like innovations in matters of worship. Other mistakes are less serious, causing the person who errs to act in a way that is undesirable. These mistakes can relate to the fast itself or to other customs and practices associated with it. We will now turn our attention to some of these mistakes.

Neglecting Congregational Prayer

Many people increase their worship in Ramadān and frequent the mosques more than usual. However, some people fall short during this month of their observance of congregational prayer and neglect the mosque.

No doubt, neglect congregational prayer is something serious. It is even more serious to neglect prayer altogether. A hadīth reads: “The covenant between us and them is prayer. Whoever abandons it has disbelieved.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2621)]

Some scholars have interpreted this to mean thanklessness for Allah’s blessings or some other lesser form of disbelief, while others have taken it to mean unbelief in the absolute sense. In any case,

the hadīth is authentic and it presents a severe warning to anyone who would abandon prayer.

There are numerous other hadīth that stress the importance of prayer. We must safeguard our worship and be steadfast in prayer. Ramadān should be an opportunity for us to change for the better and habituate ourselves to doing good deeds.

Backbiting & Rumor-Mongering

Speaking badly about other people is a way to seriously compromise one's fasting. The Prophet defined backbiting in the following way:

He said: "Do you know what backbiting is?"

They said: "Allah and His Messenger know best."

He said: "It is to mention about your brother something that he would dislike having mentioned about him."

Someone enquired: "O Messenger of Allah! How do you see it if what I said about him is true?"

He replied: "If what you said about him is true, then you have backbitten him. If what you said about him is false, then you have slandered him." [*Sahīh Muslim* (2589)]

Another evil is to spread what people say about each other in order to bring about problems. This rumour-mongering also includes divulging secrets and exposing people's faults.

Hudhayfah heard about a man who was spreading rumours and he said: "I heard Allah's Messenger say: "A rumour-monger will not enter Paradise'." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6056) and *Sahīh Muslim* (105)]

Vulgar Speech and Bad Manners

Abū Hurayrah relates that the Prophet said: "Whoever does not abandon false speech and acting falsely, then Allah has no need of his abandoning food and drink." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1903)]

The Prophet said: “Fasting is a shield, so the one who fasts should avoid obscene speech and ignorant behavior. If someone abuses him or starts to fight with him, he should reply by saying: ‘I am fasting. I am fasting’.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1795)]

Laziness and Listlessness

Some people take the Ramadān fast as an excuse for laziness. In this, they behave in stark contrast to the ways of our Pious Predecessors, who had no qualms with working hard in Ramadān and even rallying to the defense of the faith. They definitely did not become lax in their regular, daily worship. Indeed, they would increase their religious observances in this month.

Some people justify their laziness with the weak hadīth that reads: “The sleep of the fasting person is worship.” If, for the sake of argument, we assume that the hadīth is authentic, it does not justify laziness. It certainly does not pardon the practice of those who sleep all day in Ramadān and then spend the nights in feasting and merriment. The hadīth refers to the normal sleeping habits of the person, like the person’s usual daily nap. This normal sleep helps invigorate the person for further acts of worship.

It is necessary for a person to capitalize on the opportunity for blessings that the month of Ramadān has to offer. A Muslim should strive to the utmost to earn Allah’s reward during this month, keeping in mind that there is no guarantee of living to see another Ramadān.

Excessive Eating and Drinking

Some people spend their nights in Ramadān filling their stomachs with all types of food and drink, sometimes indulging in delicacies that they do not ever eat outside of Ramadān. This practice, without doubt, contradicts the very essence of Ramadān and the wisdom behind our fasting.

It is related from al-Miqdām b. Ma’di Yakrib that the Prophet said: “The human being does not fill up any vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for a person to eat just enough to keep his back straight. If he must eat more, then he can fill a third with food,

a third with drink, and leave a third for air.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2380)]

How can people learn to subdue their base impulses and desires through fasting, when they make up for it all by indulging their every whim at night, eating more during Ramadān than during the rest of the year? In some places, people have a custom of storing food and reserving it for Ramadān, so that they consume in Ramadān the quantity of food that would usually take them months to eat.

We all know that the purpose of fasting is to rein in our passions and break our desires in order to grow in piety. If we allow our hunger to build in strength from dawn to dinner time only to then indulge our hunger with greater gusto, this merely magnifies the pleasure of eating. It strengthens our passions more than if we had been left to our normal eating patterns.

Abandoning Fasting Without an Excuse

Abandoning a Ramadān fast without a valid excuse is a major sin. Those who fall into this sin must repent sincerely and earnestly to their Lord. They must also make up the days they missed later on. They must also provide a meal for a poor person for each day that they missed if they are financially able to do so.

Fasting is one of the five pillars of the religion of Islam. A person who openly abandons the Ramadān fast should be rebuked for doing so and not left to be a bad example for others.

Staying Up Late

This is a mistake if it leads to bad consequences. Some people stay up late at night and then sleep through the Morning Prayer. Some even sleep through the Noon and Afternoon Prayers. If they force themselves to get up during the day, they can suffer extreme fatigue on account of it. If they are employees, their performance at work suffers. Such people need to keep cognizant of the blessings of this month that they lose out on because of these consequences.

Brushing the Teeth while Fasting

Many people avoid brushing their teeth during the day in Ramadān. This is a mistake, since there is no contradiction between observing the fast and brushing one's teeth. Moreover, Allah's Messenger said: "Were it not for the hardship that I would be placing upon my people, I would have ordered them to engage in siwāk for every prayer." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (887) and *Sahīh Muslim* (252)]

He also said: "Were it not for the hardship that I would be placing upon my people, I would have ordered them to engage in siwāk every time they made ablutions." [*Sunan al-Nasā'ī al-Kubrā* (3032)]

We must understand that the word "siwāk" does not just refer to the tree branches that are used as tooth sticks, but to the act of brushing the teeth itself. It is derived from the verb *sāka*, meaning to rub, clean, buff, or polish.

Regarding the question of what can be used for brushing the teeth, the famed Mālikī jurist Ibn `Abd al-Barr writes: "The siwāk of the people had been from the arāk and bashām trees. Anything that polishes the teeth without harming them and sweetens the taste of the mouth is permitted for the purpose of brushing the teeth."

It is permitted to brush one's teeth at any time during the day while fasting in Ramadān. As for the hadīth that reads: "When you fast, brush your teeth in the mornings, but do not brush your teeth in the afternoon." – it is an extremely weak hadīth. It is related in *Sunan al-Bayhaqī*, *Sunan al-Dāraqutnī*, and other sources. Its chain of transmission is too weak to allow it to be used as evidence.

Therefore, the ruling regarding brushing the teeth in Ramadān remains general. It is encouraged at all times. This ruling is evident in the two hadīth mentioned above. This means that it is recommended to brush one's teeth after every wudū' and for every prayer, regardless of whether one is fasting or not, and regardless of whether it is in the morning of Ramadān or the afternoon. The Noon and Afternoon Prayers are included in this general ruling just as the Morning, Sunset, and Night Prayers are included.

In fact, there are six occasions where brushing the teeth is recommended:

1. It is recommended before each prayer.

2. It is recommended for every wudū'.

3. It is recommended upon entering the home. The father of al-Miqdām b. Shurayh asked `Ā'ishah: "What was the first thing that the Prophet used to do when he entered the house?" She replied that he would brush his teeth. [*Sahīh Muslim* (253)]

4. It is recommended when a person has bad breath. The Prophet said: "Siwāk cleanses the mouth and pleases the Lord." [*Sunan al-Nisā'i*, (5)]

5. It is recommended upon waking from sleep. Hudhayfah relates that when the Prophet got up at night, he would brush his teeth with a toothstick." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (246) and *Sahīh Muslim* (255)]

6. It is recommended when reciting the Qur'ān. The following is related by `Alī . Abī Tālib and others: "Indeed, your mouths are pathways for the Qur'ān, so make those pathways agreeable with siwāk." [*Sunan Ibn Mājah* (291) but with a weak chain of transmission]

It is recommended for Muslims to brush their teeth on these occasions whether or not they are fasting.

Some people assume that brushing the teeth while fasting is discouraged on the basis of the hadīth where the Prophet said: "I swear by Him in whose hand is my soul, the *khalūf* of a fasting person is more pleasant to Allah than the scent of musk." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1893) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1151)]

The assumption that this hadīth discourages brushing one's teeth while fasting is incorrect for two reasons:

1. The *khalūf* is the smell that comes from the stomach when it is empty of food and is not a smell emanating from the mouth.

2. Many scholars explain that the pleasantness of this *khalūf* for Allah on the Day of Judgment, as indicated by the narration of the hadīth in *Sahīh Muslim*: "I swear by Him in whose hand is my soul, the *khalūf* of a fasting person is more pleasant to Allah on the Day

of Judgment than the scent of musk.” It does not relate to the affairs of this world, so brushing the teeth will have no affect on it. If anything, brushing the teeth will provide an additional dimension of pleasantness, since it is in itself something pleasing to Allah. It is something Allah enjoined upon the Muslims through the words of His Messenger.

As for any remnants of the tooth stick that may remain in the mouth of the fasting person, these should simply be removed as best as possible. The fasting person should not let suspicions and misgivings about it be a cause to worry. Many people go to excesses in this matter and impose upon themselves unnecessary hardships. For instance, some people go to extremes in removing what remains in their mouths after brushing their teeth or in removing the food that remains in their mouths in the morning from their pre-fasting meals. There are those who find great difficulty in inhaling water and rinsing their mouths when performing ablutions. Worse still, there are some fasting people who go to the extreme of spitting out their saliva, thereby subjecting themselves to a considerable degree of suffering.

Allah has spared the Muslims all of these difficulties and constraints. He says: “Allah does not burden any soul with more than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns. (Pray): Our Lord! Do not take us to task if we forget or make a mistake. Our Lord! Do not place on us a burden like that which You placed on those before us.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 286]

Allah has removed from us the burdens which had existed for the communities of faith that came before. Therefore, it behooves us to keep things easy for ourselves and those around us in these matters.

Engaging in siwāk brings many benefits. It cleans and refreshes the mouth. It reduces phlegm. It eases the stomach and facilitates digestion. It improves the voice. It invigorates a person for the reading of the Qur’ān and for remembrance and prayer. Most importantly, it pleases our Lord. It brings joy to the angels and adds blessings to our deeds.

The same ruling that applies to siwāk applies to toothpaste. Its purpose is to promote healthy teeth and gums as well as cleanse and freshen the mouth. We should use it to brush our teeth and

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encourage our children to do so as well. It is permissible to use while fasting. It is not food and it is not swallowed. It is used in the mouth and then spat out. It is no different than rinsing the mouth when we make ablutions. Indeed, a toothbrush and toothpaste can be more effective at cleansing the mouth than siwāk, except that it is not ready at hand for use at any time like a siwāk carried in the pocket.

The Month for Repentance

During the month of Ramadān, people turn to their Lord, seek His countenance, and try to rid themselves of their sinful habits. They do so knowing that Allah is most generous and forgiving, especially during this blessed month. Allah loves the obedience of His servants, and He also loves the repentance of his disobedient servants.

If Allah wants good for someone, He facilitates for them the path of repentance, and places regret in their hearts for their sins so they can turn to Him in full sincerity. He makes it easy for them to persist in avoiding sin, beseeching Him, and engaging in good deeds.

Repentance means to turn to Allah with regret for your sins, and abandon them with a full resolve never to perpetrate them again. It also entails making amends whenever possible.

Allah encourages us many times in the Qur'an to repent. He says: "Seek the forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him in repentance; that He may grant you enjoyment, good (and true), for a term appointed, and bestow His abounding grace on all who abound in merit! But if you turn away, then I fear for you the punishment of a great day." [*Sūrah Hūd*: 3]

He also says: "O My servants who have transgressed against their souls! Do not despair of Allah's mercy, for Allah forgives all sins. He is Forgiving, Most Merciful. And turn unto your Lord repentant, and surrender unto Him, before there comes unto you the punishment, when you cannot be helped. And follow the best of ways, revealed to you from your Lord, before the punishment comes on you all of a sudden and takes you unawares!" [*Sūrah al-Zumar*: 53-55]

Likewise, He says: "O you who believe! Turn to Allah in sincere repentance in the hope that your Lord will remove from you your sins and admit you to gardens beneath which rivers flow on the Day that Allah will not disgrace the Prophet and those who believed with him." [*Sūrah al-Tabrīm*: 8]

Prophet Muhammad said: “Sometimes I perceive a veil over my heart, and ask Allah for forgiveness one hundred times a day.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (2702)]

The Prophet also said: “Allah extends His hand at night to give forgiveness to those who sinned during that day, and He extends His hand during the day to give forgiveness to those who sinned during the night. This will continue to be the case until the Sun rises from the west.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (2759)]

He also said: “Allah is happier with His servant who repents than the happiness one of you would feel if he was wandering in a barren wasteland to find his steed had wandered off with all his food and provisions. Then, after the heat and his thirst become severe, he falls asleep in the same place and wakes to find his steed standing before him, so that he grabs its reigns and says: “O Allah! I am your Lord and You are my servant”, mixing up his words on account of his extreme joy.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (2747)]

Repentance frees us from our failings and shortcomings. It is a means to achieve inner peace and contentment, especially in Ramadān

The act of repenting to Allah is sometimes a religious obligation, and at other times it is a strongly recommended act. Obligatory repentance is to repent for committing sins or neglecting religious duties. The greatest sins are unbelief, polytheism and hypocrisy, but repentance is an obligation for all sins, including usury, disobedience to parents, backbiting, slander and theft. The worst kind of theft is to misappropriate public funds which are the possession of the populace as a whole. Then there are the sins of the heart, like rancour, envy and suspicion. Repentance is required from neglecting religious duties, like prayer, fasting, Zakāh, and Hajj.

Repentance is recommended after committing an act which is disliked in Islam or neglecting an act that is recommended. We can repent for missing the Witr prayer or for neglecting the Sunnah prayers associated with the five obligatory prayers. We can repent for neglecting the Qur'an and for failing to wake up late at night to engage in worship. Likewise, we can repent for perpetrating acts that Allah and His Messenger dislike for us, even though they are not forbidden.

We always need to turn to Allah in repentance. The Prophets and Messengers turned to Allah in repentance more than anyone else. One of them would say: “Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers.” [*Sūrah al-A`rāf*: 23]. Another would say: “My Lord, indeed I have wronged myself, so forgive me.” [*Sūrah al-Qasas*: 16]

Indeed, Allah gave Prophet Muhammad the following command: “Know that there is no god but Allah, and seek forgiveness for your sins.” [*Sūrah Muhammad*: 19]

Prophet Muhammad used to ask Allah for forgiveness all the time. He would sometimes do so a hundred times in one sitting, saying: “My Lord! Forgive me and pardon my sins. Indeed, You are the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (3434) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1516)]

The Prophet said: “I seek Allah’s forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times a day.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6307)]

This was the practice of Allah’s Messengers. How much more do the rest of us need to repent, we whose lives are full of shortcomings, neglect, and sin? Certainly we have a greater need to repent.

Repentance has a long history. It started with Adam whom Satan beguiled into disobeying his Lord by telling him and his wife that he was their sincere adviser. They both fell into sin by eating the forbidden fruit. Afterwards, they repented and Allah forgave them.

One of the most well-known and interesting stories about repentance is about a man who had murdered ninety-nine people. Abū Sa`īd al-Khudrī relates the following from the Prophet:

Among the people of old, there was a man who had murdered ninety-nine people. He then asked the people to guide him to the most knowledgeable person in the world. They told him to go see a certain monk. So the man went to the monk and told him that he had killed ninety-nine people. He then asked if it were possible for him to repent. The

monk said “No,” so the man killed him as well, bringing the total to one hundred.

He again sought after the most knowledgeable person on Earth. He was directed to a scholar. The man told him that he had killed one hundred people and then asked if it were possible for him to repent.

The scholar replied: “Yes. What stands between you and repentance? You better go to such-and-such a land. You will find people there devoted to prayer and worship, and you should worship along with them. You should never return to your country, since it is an evil land for you.”

So he went off to find that land, and he had hardly covered half the distance when death overtook him. This brought on a dispute between the angels of mercy and the angels of punishment. The angels of mercy said: “This man has come penitent and remorseful to Allah.”

The angels of punishment said: “He has never done anything good at all.”

Then another angel came in the form of a human being in order to decide between them. He said: “Measure the distance between where he fell and the land from which he departed, as well as the remaining distance to his destination. Find out which land he is nearest to. That is where he belongs. They measured both distances and found him to be nearer to his destination, so the angels of mercy took possession of him. [*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (3470) and *Saḥīḥ Muslim* (2766)]

Another wonderful story of repentance is the story of Kifl. The Prophet said:

Kifl was a man from the Children of Israel. He never restrained himself from committing any sin. Once he gave a woman sixty gold coins to let himself have his way with her. Then, when he had seated himself in the position a man takes with his wife, she began to weep. He asked: “Why do you cry. Have I done something to make you detest me?”

She said: “No, but this is something I have never done.”

He asked: “Then what is making you do it now?”

She replied: “I am in serious need of the money.”

So he stood up and left her, saying: “The sixty gold coins are yours.”

Then he said: “I swear by Allah, I will never sin against Allah again.”

He died before waking the next morning, and Allah had forgiven all his sins.

The Conditions of Repentance

If the sin was against the rights of Allah and involve no injustice against anyone else, the conditions of repentance are three:

1. To abstain from committing the sin.
2. To feel regret for committing it.
3. To have a firm resolve never to return to the sin again.

If the sin involved a wrong against another person, then there is an additional condition, which is to redress that wrong. If it involved money, the money should be repaid. If it involved false accusation, the falsehood should be cleared up. If redress is not possible, the person’s pardon should be sought.

We must repent for all of our sins. If we repent for some of them, our repentance is valid for those sins, but our other sins will remain. Some sins exist on the societal level, like ignorance, backwardness, civil strife, prejudice, and the culture of bigotry. These are among the most serious of sins, and we should certainly repent for them.

Factors That Help Us Repent

1. A strong resolve. The strength and weakness of our resolve is an important factor in whether we are going to fall into sin. It is

one of the reasons why people exhibit inconsistent behaviour, repenting today and sinning tomorrow, then repenting again on the next.

There are ways to strengthen our resolve. We can turn our hearts to Allah, beseech Him in supplication, and keep wholesome company. An optimistic outlook also helps, as is developing the habit of trying again after failure and avoiding despair.

2. Asking Allah's help. We should beseech Allah in our supplications and ask Him to make us sincere in our repentance and accept it from us. Abraham used to call upon Allah with the words: "Our Lord, make us Muslims [in submission] to You and make our descendants a Muslim nation [in submission] to You, and show us our rites and accept our repentance. Indeed, You are the Pardoner of Sins, the Merciful." [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 128]

Prophet Muhammad used to say, "My Lord! Forgive me and pardon my sins. Indeed, You are the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (3434) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1516)]

3. Keeping away from environments that tempt us to commit sin. People are like the company they keep. And they will be resurrected in the Hereafter along with them. We saw this in the story mentioned above where the scholar advised the murderer: "You should never return to your country, since it is an evil land for you."

4. Avoiding pessimism and despair. These negative feelings are Satan's biggest window into our hearts. Those who commit sin often have a defeatist attitude. It is impermissible for a Muslim to dwell in despair. Allah says: "Never despair of Allah's mercy. No one despairs of Allah's mercy except the unbelieving people." [*Sūrah Yūsuf*: 87]

We can help ourselves avoid despair by remembering the Prophet's words: "I swear by Him in whose hand is my soul, if you were a people who never sinned, Allah would take you away and replace you with a people who would sin and then ask His forgiveness so He could forgive them." [*Sahīh Muslim* (2749)]

We should also remember that the Prophet said: "All the descendants of Adam are sinners, and the best of sinners are those who repent." [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2499)]

5. Striving to do good. All people are capable of doing good. We should engage more in prayer, reading the Qur'an, asking Allah's forgiveness, fasting, and His remembrance. We should call other people to righteousness and discourage them from sin. We should be kind to our parents and help others. We should do whatever good we can. Allah says: "And establish prayer at the two ends of the day and at the approach of the night. Indeed, good deeds do away with misdeeds. This is a reminder for the mindful. And be patient, for Allah will not let the reward of the righteous be lost." [*Sūrah Hūd*: 114-115]

6. Sincerity to Allah. When we are sincere to our Lord, and therefore sincere in our repentance, Allah helps us and makes things easy for us. In the Qur'an, Allah mentions those who will be punished, then says: "Except for those who repent, correct themselves, hold fast to Allah, and are sincere in their religion for Allah, for those will be with the believers. And Allah is going to give the believers a great reward." [*Sūrah al-Nisā'*: 146]

7. Avoid Distant Hopes. Be aware that life is short. The Prophet said to Ibn 'Umar: "Be in this world as if you are a stranger of a wayfarer on the road." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī*: 6416]

Ibn 'Umar would later comment on this by saying: "When you go to sleep at night, do not expect to wake up the next morning, and when you wake up, do not expect to live until nightfall. Take advantage of your health while you have it, and take advantage of your life while you are still alive."

8. Contemplating the harmful effects of sin. These are many. They include:

A. Being deprived of religious knowledge. This knowledge is the path to Paradise. Knowledge is the light that Allah places in our hearts, and sins extinguish this light. When the eminent jurist al-Shāfi'ī was a child studying under Mālik, Mālik noticed his keen intellect and quick understanding. He gave al-Shāfi'ī the following advice: "I see that Allah has placed light in your heart. Do not extinguish it with the darkness of sin."

B. Being deprived of sustenance: In the same way that piety draws Allah's provisions near, abandoning piety draws poverty near. Allah says: "Whoever fears Allah, he will make for him a way out and

provide for him from where he does not expect.” [*Sūrah al-Talāq*: 2-3]

Many people amass huge amounts of wealth and then lose it all in a sinful business deal or squander it in ways that they know are displeasing to their Lord.

C. Finding life's difficulties compounded. Allah makes things easy for his righteous servants. He says: “And whoever fears Allah, He will make matters easy for him.” [*Sūrah al-Talāq*: 4]

The opposite is equally true. The effects of sin even affect the sinful person's servants and vehicles. They become a source of worry and stress. It is out of Allah's mercy that everyone enjoys the world, whether they are believers or unbelievers, righteous people or sinners. However, nearness to Allah is a source of contentment and inner peace. Allah says: “Those who believe in Allah, He guides their hearts aright.” [*Sūrah al-Taghābun*: 11] and: “It is only through the remembrance of Allah that the heart finds ease.” [*Sūrah al-Ra'd*: 28]

D. Living in disgrace: Those who pay and receive bribes are disgraceful people, even if they amass millions. Those who engage in wanton sexual behaviour are debased and shameful in themselves.

The opposite is true for the righteous. Allah says: “Whoever desires honour and might [should know that] all honour and might belong to Allah.” [*Sūrah Fātir*: 10] When believers conduct themselves with righteousness, it makes them feel confident and at ease. It is related that the Prophet said: “Honesty brings peace of mind, while lying brings troubled thoughts.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2518)]

E. Spoiling life's blessings: Sin is a form of thanklessness for Allah's blessings. We show gratitude to Him by obeying Him and fulfilling our duties to Him. How many women live carefree lives in happy homes until they start indulging in sin and find their happiness turn to grief. How many young men fall into sin to find their lives unravelling and the world constricting around them.

F. Having a straightened life in this world, and punishment in the Hereafter. Allah says: “Whoever turns away from My remembrance,

his will be a narrow life, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment.” [*Sūrah Tāhā*: 124]

Some of those who deny Allah might live happily in this world because they resort to the appropriate means to attain their worldly goals. Allah says: “He had been happy among his people.” [*Sūrah al-Inshiqāq*: 13] This is because Allah is just and generous. Likewise, a believer might be beset by worries and anxiety because of psychological problems or due to childhood trauma, or on account of some tragedy. Mental illnesses are like physical ones, and patience is the best treatment for all sicknesses and difficulties.

9. Contemplating Allah’s wisdom in creating sin and giving people the ability to choose sin. This is because there are two kinds devotion we show Allah. The first is the devotion of the mind. We believe in Allah, submit to Him, and ponder His signs in Creation. We also keep dubious thoughts from our minds and remedy them by remembering our Lord and seeking knowledge.

Then there is the devotion of our hearts. We love Allah, fear Him, and pin our hopes on Him. We abstain from indulging our base desires and perpetrating sins.

People can transgress with their minds and with their hearts. A good example of a transgression of the mind is what befell Satan. His sin was not based wholly upon his passions. He also laboured under the false notion that he was superior to Adam, and therefore refused to bow down to Adam when Allah commanded him to do so. Because of this disobedience, Allah cursed him.

This is different from what befell Adam and Eve when they ate the forbidden fruit. That was on account of their inner passions and desires. As a consequence, Allah forgave Adam and Eve and favoured them after they turned to Him in repentance. This was not the case for Satan, because his false notions prevented him from repenting and consequently deprived him of Allah’s mercy.

This teaches us the importance of being humble and soft-hearted in the reverence and devotion we show Allah. Sometimes we fall into sin to keep us humble and prevent us from becoming conceited on account of our deeds. It is related that the Prophet said: “If you never sinned, I fear you would fall into something worse: You would become conceited.” [*Shu‘ab al-Īmān* (7255)]

This is why we should never despair of Allah accepting our repentance. We should always hope for His forgiveness. This is true even if we succumb to sin repeatedly, even after repenting for it.

10. Atoning for sins. Atonement takes many forms. Some are things that are decreed to befall us that we do not choose to bring about, like sickness, hardships in life, the pain of death, and the trials of the Day of Judgment. When we show patience in the face of such adversities, we receive more blessings and the atonement for our sins is greater.

Other forms of atonement are actions that we choose to carry out of our own free will, like asking Allah for forgiveness and doing good deeds. Allah says: “Ask your Lord’s forgiveness. Indeed, He is Most Forgiving.” [*Sūrah Nūh*: 10] and: “Indeed, good deeds do away with misdeeds.” [*Sūrah Hūd*: 114]

We can wipe away our sins by spending in charity, honouring our parents, maintaining family ties, and showing kindness to others. Believers should hasten to crowd out their sins by doing all the good deeds they can. We should strive to have our good deeds outweigh our sins in the balance on the Day of Judgement. We should rein in our sins so they do not proliferate and consume our time and energy. We are defined by the preponderance of our deeds. When what we do is overwhelmingly good, we are good people, even if we have a few shortcomings. Those who are overwhelmingly bad in their conduct are bad people.

Satan causes some people to fall into perdition after committing a small sin by making them despair. Indeed, despair is a greater sin, because it makes the person stop trying to make amends and do what is right. That person then slips further and further into sin.

We must ask Allah to protect us and guide our hearts. We ask Him to cover our faults, give us relief from what distresses us, illuminate our paths for us, and forgive us our sins.

Good Character

The purpose of all the revealed books has always been inner purification. Abraham prayed to his Lord to send to his descendants a messenger who would recite His signs to them, teach them the scripture, and purify them. Allah answered his prayer by sending Muhammad. Allah says: “It is He who has sent amongst the unlettered people a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to purify them, and to instruct them in the scripture and wisdom,- although they had been, before, in manifest error.” [*Sūrah al-Jumu`ab*: 2]

He also says: “Likewise, We have sent unto you a messenger from among yourselves, who recites unto you Our revelations and purifies you, and teaches you the scripture and wisdom, and teaches you that which you did not know.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 151]

Prophet Muhammad declared this great purpose when he said: “I have only been sent to perfect good moral character.” [*Musnad Ahmad* (8595)]

The “good moral character” referred to here is comprehensive. It includes how we conduct ourselves with our Lord, how each of us relates to his or her self, and how we treat other people.

The Prophet’s statement implies there are two types of good moral conduct. The first is common knowledge. People know it instinctively. The other type is that which completes and perfects it. This cannot be known without Allah’s guidance through revelation. The Prophet was sent to teach it to the people as part of the message he brought.

The Prophet’s guidance in this matter is vast. Many books have been written about it. One of the most famous hadīth in this regard is where the Prophet said: “Nothing weighs heavier in the balance on the Day of Judgement than good character. Allah hates that which is wanton and base.” [*Sunan al-Trimidhī* (2002) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (4799)]

The Prophet was asked what causes the most people to enter Paradise. He said: “Fear of Allah and good character.” He was then

asked what brought the most people to the Hellfire. He said: “The tongue and the private parts.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2004)]

The Prophet’s servant Anas observed: “Allah’s Messenger had the best character of all people.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6203) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2150)]

He also said: “I have never touched silk of any quality that was softer than the hand of Allah’s Messenger. I never smelled a scent that was sweeter than his.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1973, 3561) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2330)]

He said: “I served the Prophet for ten years and he never once rebuked me. He never once said about something I did: ‘Why did you do that?’ and he never said about something I didn’t do: ‘Why didn’t you do that?’” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6038) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2309)]

Al-Nawwās b. Sam`ān asked the Prophet about righteousness and sin. He replied: “Righteousness is to exhibit good character. Sin is what disturbs your heart and you hate for others know about it.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (2553)]

`Abd Allah b. `Amr b. al-`Ās said: “Allah’s Messenger was not a crude man and he did not behave crudely. He used to say: ‘Among the best of you are those with the best character.’” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (3559) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2321)]

The Prophet also said: “The believers who have the most perfect faith are those who have the best character, and the best of them are those who are best to their womenfolk.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (1162) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (4682)]

He also said: “A believer can attain though good character the blessings and rewards of fasting and prayer.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (4798)]

He said: “The most beloved and nearest of you in proximity to me on the Day of Judgement will be those of you with the best character. The most detestable and remote from me on the Day of Judgement will be those who are babblers, ranters, and vainglorious.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2018)]

It is enough for us to look at the Prophet's example and observe how he treated people of all walks of life, how he behaved with his household, his relatives, his Companions, and his enemies.

Once the Prophet borrowed money from a man, and the man came demanding payment, speaking very harshly. The Companions wanted to respond to the man's harshness, but the Prophet said: "Leave him alone. The one who has a right to something is allowed to speak." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (2306) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1601)]

Whenever the Prophet borrowed something from someone, he would always return it with more and pray for that person. He used to say: "The only reward for a loan is complete repayment and praise." [*Musnad Ahmad* (16410)]

A Jewish rabbi, Zayd b. Sa`nah, came to the Prophet demanding repayment. He grabbed the Prophet by the front of his shirt, scowled in his face, and said: "Muhammad, aren't you going to pay me my due? By Allah! I did not know the family of `Abd al-Muttalib to be late in paying their debts. I have dealt with them before and know them."

`Umar grabbed the man and said: "Enemy of Allah! Do you speak to Allah's Messenger these words I hear and behave towards him like this! I swear by the One who sent him in truth, if I did not fear the consequences, I would strike your neck with my sword."

The Prophet watched `Umar quietly and deliberately. Then he said: "I need something entirely different from you, `Umar. You should be telling me to repay the debt well, and telling him to ask nicely. `Umar, go with him and pay him what is due to him, and increase it by twenty *sa`* measures for your upsetting him." [*Sahīh Ibn Hibbān* (288)]

`Abd Allah b. Salām had been one of the leading Jewish scholars in Madinah. He was just-minded and a seeker of the truth. When he heard about Prophet Muhammad's arrival, he went to have a look at him. When he saw the Prophet's face, he knew that it was not the face of a liar. The first thing he heard the Prophet say was: "O people! If you spread the greeting of peace among you, feed those who need food, uphold kinship ties, and pray at night while people are sleeping, you will enter Paradise with ease." [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2485)]

‘Abd Allah b. Salām was able to read from the Prophet’s countenance the signs that he was honest, trustworthy, and pure-hearted. Such a countenance is only for people whose hearts are truly pure, whose conduct is righteous, and who devote themselves to Allah.

The Four Foundations of Good Character

There are many ways to exhibit good character. However, it all goes back to four essentials.

1. Patience: It takes patience to be gentle and kind under trying circumstances. It takes patience to swallow back anger and exercise self-restraint. It is necessary for the qualities of forgiveness, pardon, and self-restraint.

Fasting is the companion of patience. The month of Ramadān is an invitation to forgive, forget, and renew our relationships with family, co-workers, and neighbours with whom our affections have become strained. Allah says: “Let them pardon and overlook. Do you not wish that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.” [*Sūrah al-Nūr*:22]

2. Decency: This is the quality that helps people abstain from base and ignoble behaviour and turns their hearts to that which is noble and high-minded.

3. Courage: This is the quality that inspires people to greatness and generosity and prevents them from succumbing to anger and rash behaviour.

4. Justice: This quality applies to dealing with oneself as well as others. This includes being moderate in behaviour. Every noble character trait stands between two ignoble traits at opposite extremes. If people becomes neglectful of the noble trait, they fall into one of the bad ones. If they go to excess in it, it brings them to the other bad quality.

For instance, gentleness is a good character trait, akin to kindness. However, taking it to an excess leads to indignity and humiliation, while being neglectful of it leads to harshness, cruelty, and severity. Generosity is another good and desirable character

trait. Taking it too far leads to reckless spending and wastefulness, while neglecting it makes one a greedy, envious miser.

People naturally possess many good qualities and character traits, some of which they learned from their parents or picked up from their social environment. These qualities become part of their personalities. Prophet Muhammad said to Ashajj 'Abd al-Qays: "You possess two qualities that Allah loves: gentleness and forbearance." [*Sahih Muslim* (170)]

In some narrations of this event, Prophet Muhammad goes on to tell Ashajj that Allah made these traits part of his natural disposition, to which Ashajj replied: "Praise be to Allah who placed within me two qualities that Allah and His Messenger love." [*Sunan Abi Dawud* (5225)]

How to Develop Good Character

1. Striving within yourself to exhibit good character traits and refrain from bad ones. Allah says: "Those who strive for Our sake, We will guide them to Our paths." [*Surah al-'Ankabut*: 69] Good character is part of Allah's guidance.

2. Self-assessment. This means to look back on one's behaviour. Those who call themselves to account benefit from it in all aspects of their lives. This is why Allah swears by the "self-reproaching spirit" in the Qur'an. Al-Hasan al-Basri explains that the self-reproaching spirit describes the spirit of the believer.

3. Aspiring for the best. We should aspire to be the best we can be, and this includes our behaviour. We should seek out and even create opportunities to exhibit good behaviour.

4. Substitution. We should find alternatives to the bad behaviour that we exhibit, alternatives that allow us to express and develop our good traits.

We are influenced by the people around us, by our families, classmates, colleagues, and friends. However, the greatest influence over us is the influence we have upon our own individual selves, in how we approach and understand ourselves, train ourselves and censure ourselves. This means we need to recognise our faults and weaknesses as well as our virtues and strengths.

In the Company of Those Who Fast

O Allah! Help us to see the weaknesses within ourselves and help us to overcome them. Do not leave us without Your assistance for a moment.

I'tikāf

The Arabic word “*i'tikāf*” literally means to remain with something and confine oneself to it. It specifically refers to the practice of staying in the mosque as an act of devotion.

I `tikāf is a form of worship with many benefits. First and foremost, we draw closer to Allah, since we cut ourselves off from other people and focus completely on worshipping Him. We can for a time push aside our worldly distractions and concerns and turn wholeheartedly to our Lord. We even put aside some of our religious duties, like those we have to our families and children. We spend this time in the mosque glorifying Allah, beseeching His forgiveness, and reading the Qur'an. This purifies our hearts.

Ibn al-Qayyim says:

Since the hearts' goodness and its firmness upon Allah's path depends upon directing it solely to Allah and giving all its attention to Him, and since the maladies of the heart cannot be rectified except by turning to Allah, He prescribed i'tikāf for the people, so that the heart can be fully occupied with Allah, focused upon Him alone, and cut off from the distractions of the world. It can be engrossed with Him alone, such that remembering Him, loving Him and turning to Him take the place of all the heart's troubles and anxieties, and it is able to overcome them. Thus, all the person's concerns are for Him. His thoughts are all of remembrance of Him, and thinking of how to draw close to Him and attain His Pleasure. This leads him to feel at home with Allah instead of with the people, and this prepares him for being at peace with Him alone on the day of loneliness in the grave, when there is no one else to give comfort, nor anyone to grant solace except Him. This is the greater goal of i'tikāf.

The Prophet observed i'tikāf every year during the last ten nights of Ramadān up until the time he died. In the one year he missed it, he made it up in the following month of Shawwāl. He

first observed i`tikāf during the first ten nights of Ramadān. Then he did so on the middle the nights, then in the last ten nights, seeking the blessed Night of Decree (*Laylah al-Qadr*). When it was revealed to him that the Night of Decree was in the last ten nights, he offered i`tikāf in those nights for the rest of his life. He even had a small tent erected for him in the mosque so he could be in seclusion with his Lord.

Whenever the Prophet wished to observe i`tikāf, he would offer the Morning Prayer and then go to the place in the mosque where he would be staying. On one occasion, he resolved to observe i`tikāf and called for his tent to be set up. Afterwards, his wives did so as well. When he finished offering the Morning prayer, he saw all the tents erected in the mosque and instructed that his tent be packed away. This was the year he left off i`tikāf in Ramadān and offered it instead during the first ten nights of Shawwāl. [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (2033, 2041) and *Sabīh Muslim* (1172)]

When he was observing i`tikāf, he would extend his head out of the mosque so his wife `Ā'ishah could wash and groom his hair. She would do this for him, even when she was on her period and could not enter the mosque.

The Ruling of I`tikāf

I`tikāf is a recommended, Sunnah act. This is a matter of unanimous agreement among the Muslims. Scholars of the Hanafī and Shāfi`ī schools add that it becomes an emphatic Sunnah during the last ten nights of Ramadān.

Allah mentions i`tikāf in the Qur'an in two places. He says: "And do not have relations with them as long as you are in retreat in the mosques." [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 187]

He also says: "And We charged Abraham and Ishmael, [saying], 'Purify My House for those who circumambulate it, and those who are staying [there] in retreat and those who bow and prostrate [in prayer].'" [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 125]

`Ā'ishah related: "The Prophet observed i`tikāf, and then his wives and Companions followed him in doing so." [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (2025, 2026) and *Sabīh Muslim* (1172)]

‘Umar once came to Prophet Muhammad and said to him: “In the days of ignorance before Islam, I made a vow to spend a night in the Sacred Mosque observing i`tikāf.”

The Prophet said to him: “You should fulfil your vow.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1927) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1656)]

The majority of Muslim scholars agree that i`tikāf is a Sunnah at all times of the year, though its virtue is greatest during the month of Ramadān, and most emphatic during the last ten nights of that month.

All scholars agree that a woman can observe i`tikāf in the mosque just like men. It is established in the Sunnah that the Prophet’s wives observed i`tikāf. We have seen that ‘Ā’ishah said: “...then his wives and Companions followed him in doing so.”

I`tikāf must be observed in a mosque. This is because Allah says: “as long as you are in retreat in the mosques.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 187] and: “Purify My House for those who circumambulate it, and those who are staying [there] in retreat.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 125]

Also, ‘Ā’ishah said: “There is no i`tikāf except in a mosque.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd*: 2475)]

It is from Islam’s great wisdom that i`tikāf is prescribed in the place where prayers are held, where Muslims regularly come together to worship and strengthen their faith. Allah did not prescribe for us to observe our retreats in a cave or in a cloister, because Islam is built upon actively engaging with life, not shunning it. Therefore, even in the act of worship which entails seclusion and observing a retreat, it is carried out in a public place where people congregate five times a day.

The best mosque for observing i`tikāf is the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, al-Masjīd al-Harām. This is followed in virtue by observing it in the Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah, and then the Farthest Mosque in Jerusalem. After these, it is best to observe i`tikāf in a main mosque where Friday congregational prayers are held. Smaller mosques come last. There were a few scholars who said that i`tikāf is valid only in the three mosques. This opinion is disfavoured. The vast majority of scholars agree that it can be observed in any mosque where regular prayers are held. This is because Allah refers

to the mosques for i`tikāf in general terms: “And do not have relations with them as long as you are in retreat in the mosques.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 187]

Muslims observing i`tikāf should busy themselves with acts of pure devotion that bring them closer to Allah, like prayer, supplication, asking forgiveness, reading the Qur’an and glorifying Allah’s name. They can also engage in good deeds that benefit others which are appropriate for the mosque setting, like teaching the Qur’an, relating prophetic hadīth, studying religious knowledge, and exhorting one another to righteousness.

They should avoid all words and deeds which do not concern them while in the state of i`tikāf. This, of course, is how we are supposed to be at all times, because the Prophet said: “From the perfection of a person’s Islam is his leaving alone what does not concern him.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2317) and *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (3976)]

Leaving the Mosque during I`tikāf

Leaving the mosque unnecessarily nullifies a person’s i`tikāf. This is a matter that is agreed upon by all scholars of Islamic Law. On the same token, they are all equally agreed that leaving the mosque out of necessity does not nullify the person’s i`tikāf. There are a number of issues relating to this:

1. Leaving the mosque to fulfil physical needs. It is permissible for a person in i`tikāf to leave the mosque in order to fulfil physical needs like going to the bathroom. This is a matter of unanimous agreement. `Ā’ishah relates: “He never used to enter his home except to relieve himself.” [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (2029) and *Sabīh Muslim* (297)]

2. Leaving the mosque for the purpose of purification. It is unquestionably permissible for a person in i`tikāf to leave the mosque in order to perform the required acts of purification for prayer, these acts being wudū’ and the mandatory ghusl, if there are no facilities to do so within the mosque. This is also a matter of unanimous agreement.

3. Leaving the mosque in order to eat and drink. This is permissible if no one is available to bring food and drink to the

mosque In this case, it will not be a violation of the i`tikāf to leave in order to eat and drink.

4. Leaving the mosque to perform a ritual bath (ghusl) that is recommended but not required – like the ghusl for the Friday prayer. This is permitted by scholars of the Mālikī school but prohibited by the majority of scholars.

5 Leaving the mosque to attend the Friday prayer. This is obligatory for those who are observing i`tikāf in a local mosque where Friday prayers are not held.

6. Leaving the mosque to visit someone who is sick or to attend a funeral prayer. The majority of scholars hold the view that it is not permissible for people to leave for these reasons unless they have made departing from the mosque for these reasons a precondition of their i`tikāf.

‘A’ishah relates: “If I had to enter the house for some need and there was a sick person within, I would not enquire about him except while I was passing through.” [*Sabīh Muslim* (297)] This is evidence that a person observing i`tikāf does not depart to visit the sick or to attend a funeral.

7. Leaving the mosque out of forgetfulness. According to the majority of scholars, if a person leaves the mosque forgetfully, it does not nullify the i`tikāf. This is the correct view and the one upheld by the Hanbalī and Shāfi`ī schools of law.

This is because Allah says in the Qur’an: “Our Lord! Do not take us to task if we forget or make a mistake.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 286]

Likewise, the Prophet said: “My people have been pardoned what they do by mistake and out of forgetfulness.” [*Sunan Ibn Mājah* (2045)]

Also, since eating out of forgetfulness while fasting does not nullify a person’s fast, it follows that leaving the mosque out of forgetfulness will have a similar ruling.

8. Leaving the mosque on account of an illness. Illnesses are of two kinds. There are mild illnesses like a headache and a slight fever. Scholars are agreed that a person afflicted with such a mild illness is not allowed to leave the mosque on account of it.

If the sickness is severe enough that it requires a person to leave the mosque in order to seek treatment, then the correct opinion is that it is permissible for the afflicted person to leave the mosque and this will not nullify the i'tikāf. This means that people who are very sick may go to the hospital and receive treatment, and maybe even sleep there for a time. When they return to the mosque, they simply build from where they left off.

Things that Nullify One's I'tikāf

1. Sexual intercourse. There is no dispute among the scholars that the observance of i'tikāf is nullified for anyone who deliberately engages in sexual intercourse, knowing it is a violation of i'tikāf. This is because Allah says: "And do not have relations with them as long as you are in retreat in the mosques." [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 187] However, if someone does so because they forgot they are observing i'tikāf, then the i'tikāf is valid. As for kissing and caressing, this does not invalidate i'tikāf unless it brings the person to having a sexual discharge.

2. Leaving the mosque unnecessarily. This is because the two pillars of i'tikāf are to remain in the mosque and to do so with the express intention of observing i'tikāf.

3. Ceasing to be a legally accountable entity. This is where the person goes insane, becomes intoxicated, leaves Islam, or falls into any other state where their acts of worship are no longer valid.

4. Menstruation and post-natal bleeding: The majority of scholars regard these as being circumstances which negate a woman's i'tikāf. This is because they hold the view that women in these two states are not allowed to remain in the mosque.

Is it required to fast while observing i'tikāf outside the month of Ramadān? The strongest scholarly view is that it is preferable to fast, but not obligatory. It is better for the person to be fasting as well, or to observe i'tikāf during the prescribed time of fasting. This is the position of Shāfi'ī, Hanbalī, and Zāhirī scholars. It was the opinion of a number of the Prophet's Companions, including `Alī, Ibn `Abbās, and Ibn Mas`ūd. The early scholars al-Hasan al-Basrī, Abū Thawr, and Ibn al-Mundhir also shared this view.

Does i`tikāf have a minimum timeframe? The majority of scholars hold the view that there is no minimum specified timeframe. Any time that a person spends in the mosque can be an observance of i`tikāf, even if it is only for an hour of the day. Some go so far as to recognize a stay of a few moments to be an observance of i`tikāf.

Other scholars disagree. They say that for a person to observe a valid i`tikāf, he or she must remain in the mosque for at least one day. Some of them say that remaining in the mosque for the duration of a night is sufficient.

The strongest view – and Allah knows best – is that if a person stays in the mosque longer than the usual amount of time, and the person spends this extra time in the mosque with the intention of observing i`tikāf, then it will count as a valid i`tikāf.

Another possible view is that i`tikāf can be observed for the time interval between two prayers, like the Noon and Afternoon prayers, or between the Afternoon and the Sunset prayers, or between the Sunset and Night prayers.

This is because the Prophet said to his Companions: “Should I guide you to something that will wipe away your sins and raise you in status?” When the people answered in the affirmative, he continued: “Perfecting your ablutions at times when it is difficult to doing so, taking many steps to the mosque, and waiting for prayer after prayer. This is constant readiness.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (251)]

The Benefits of I`tikāf

1. Strengthening the sincerity of our intentions. This is because only Allah knows if we are truly observing i`tikāf.

2. Learning to avoid superfluous speech, as well as excess food, sleep and socialising.

3. Learning to increase our portion of worship. This is especially true for offering the Late Night prayer, reading the Qur'an, beseeching Allah's forgiveness, remembering Allah, and engaging in communion with our Lord.

4. Strengthening our connection with Allah. We spend our time in i`tikāf beseeching our Lord, appealing to Him, and engaging in communion with Him.

5. Contemplation. We learn to use our minds for the highest and noblest purposes.

6. Taking stock of ourselves and accounting for our conduct. We can assess how we are behaving with respect to our religion and worship, as well as how wholesomely we are conducting our worldly affairs.

7. Learning to make the best use of time, and filling that time with reading and memorising the Qur'an and with religious study.

8. Learning to be alone for a while. Being away from the people allows us to steer our own course and think clearly. It lets us take a good look at ourselves and reassess our circumstances. We can see ourselves anew, without outside pressures and influences colouring our judgement. This, accompanied by Allah's remembrance and worship, is a provision for our souls. No doubt, contemplation and reflection are among the greatest forms of worship. It is the form of worship engaged in by the mind, the faculty by which Allah distinguished the human being from other creatures.

Sadly, many people do exactly the opposite when they observe i`tikāf. They make it an occasion for socialising and receiving visitors in the mosque. This is quite different from the i`tikāf the Prophet used to observe.

9. Avoiding sin. A person engaged in i`tikāf is able to avoid sinful behaviour altogether or at least minimise it to the greatest possible extent.

10. Learning patience. I`tikāf teaches us self-restraint, which strengthens us to resist base temptations and sin.

It is good for people who are fasting to observe i`tikāf, even for a short time, just to experience the effects of doing so, share in its benefits, emulate the conduct of the righteous, and revive one of our Prophet's Sunnahs. It is important that we pay attention to keeping the mosque clean and avoid disturbing others. The people attending the mosque have rights. Our observance of i`tikāf should

never make the mosque untidy or turn it into a noisy place. Our presence should only increase the atmosphere of calm and devotion that should exist in the mosque.

The Last Ten Nights

The last ten nights of Ramadān are very special. The first of these nights occurs on the eve of the 21st day of Ramadān. In other words, it is the night that commences after the completion of the 20th day of fasting. Sometimes there are only nine nights, whenever the month of Ramadān lasts for only 29 days. Nevertheless, they are still traditionally referred to as “the last ten nights”.

The last ten nights of Ramadān are very special. These are the nights that the Prophet would spend in constant worship. Among these nights is Laylah al-Qadr – a night more blessed than a thousand months.

The Prophet used to single these nights out for worship and the performance of good deeds. He would exert himself in worship during these ten nights more than any other nights of the year.

‘Ā’ishah tells us: “During the last ten nights of Ramadān, the Prophet would tighten his waist belt and spend the night in worship. He would also wake up his family.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (2024) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1174)]

‘Ā’ishah also said: “I had never known Allah’s Messenger to read the entire Qur’an in a single night, or to spend the whole night in prayer up until the morning, or to spend a whole month in fasting – except in Ramadān.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (746)]

When we say that the Prophet spent the whole night in worship, we should qualify it. This is because he would spend some time eating dinner, partaking of his pre-dawn meal, and other similar activities. However, he would spend most of the night in worship.

Waking Up the Family

‘Ā’ishah informs us that the Prophet used to wake up his family during the last ten nights of Ramadān. Indeed, he used to wake up his wives for prayer throughout the year, but that was so that they could pray for a small fraction of the night.

We know this, because Umm Salamah relates that the Prophet woke her up one night and said: “Glory be to Allah. What has been sent down of trials during this night? What has been sent down of treasures, so that the denizens of the bedchambers will be awakened? O Lord! To be clothed in this world by naked in the Hereafter.” [*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (1126)]

During the last ten nights of Ramadān, the Prophet would wake up his wives to pray for a much longer portion of the night than during the rest of the year.

Exerting Oneself in Worship

ʿĀʾishah tells us: “The Prophet would exert himself in worship during the last ten nights more than at any other time of the year.” [*Saḥīḥ Muslim* (1175)]

The great jurist, al-Shāfiʿī declares: “It is Sunnah for one to exert greater efforts in worship during the last ten nights of Ramadān.”

When ʿĀʾishah tells us that the Prophet would “tighten his waistbelt”, she is speaking figuratively. The phrase means to set about to devote oneself fully and wholeheartedly to the task at hand.

Seeking Out the Night of Decree (Laylah al-Qadr)

One of the greatest distinctions of these ten special nights is that one of them is Laylah al-Qadr – the Night of Decree. This is the greatest night of the year – better than a thousand months. This means that we can earn more rewards on Laylah al-Qadr than we would if – excluding this special night – we were to worship our Lord for eighty-four years straight. This is one of the immense favours that Allah has bestowed upon the Muslim community.

Many of the commentators on the Qurʾan say: “Good works performed on this night are better than those performed consistently for a thousand months.”

Laylah al-Qadr is on one of the odd nights. ʿĀʾishah relates that Allah’s Messenger said: “Seek out Laylah al-Qadr in the odd

nights during the last ten nights of Ramadān.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1913) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1169)]

It is most likely one of the last seven odd nights. Ibn `Umar relates that Allah’s Messenger said: “Look for it in the last ten nights. If one of you falls weak or unable to do so, then he should at least try on the seven remaining nights.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (1165)]

The most likely candidate for Laylah al-Qadr is the 27th night of Ramadān. This is indicated by the statement of `Ubayy b. Ka`b: “I swear by Allah that I know which night it is. It is the night which Allah’s Messenger ordered us to observe in prayer. It is the night on the eve of the 27th of Ramadān. Its sign is that the Sun will rise in the morning of that day white without exuding any rays.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (762)]

A Muslim should seek out this special night by spending the last ten nights of Ramadān engaged in various acts of worship. These include reciting the remembrances of Allah, reading the Qur`ān, and begging Allah’s forgiveness. It is best for us to strive hard on all ten nights, because the Prophet said: The way we “look for” Laylah al-Qadr is by engaging in extra worship. He did not mean that we should literally “look for” signs and indications that distinguish Laylah al-Qadr from other nights. The things that distinguish Laylah al-Qadr from other nights are part of the Unseen.

All that Allah says is: “Surely We revealed it on a blessed night. Surely We ever wish to warn (against evil) – On this night, every wise matter is made distinct.” [*Sūrah al-Dukhān* (3-4)] And He says: “Laylah al-Qadr is better than a thousand months. The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the permission of their Lord, with every decree. (This night is) peace, until the rising of the dawn.” [*Sūrah al-Qadr* (3-5)]

These are the ways in which Laylah al-Qadr is special. They are not things that we can see with our eyes. No one after the Prophet can see the angels.

Observing I`tikāf

Observing a retreat in the mosque is of the best things we can do during the last ten nights of Ramadān, as already discussed. We

should observe this act of worship for at least one day or part of a day. The purpose of doing so is to devote one's heart exclusively to Allah. The person engaging in i'tikāf keeps this intention close to mind and seeks Allah's blessings. It is important not forget the reason why we are observing this retreat. When we observe i'tikāf, we do not leave the mosque except for what is absolutely necessary (like going to the bathroom). While in the mosque, we should busy ourselves with the remembrance of Allah. We should take particular care to offer the remembrances of the morning and evening and the prescribed remembrances for the five daily prayers. We should perform all of the Sunnah prayers and all other recommended prayers, like the Duhā prayer. We should read as much of the Qur'ān as we can. We should spend less time eating and sleep as little as possible. We should avoid unnecessary talk. However, we can engage in advising our fellow Muslims, and enjoining them to truth and to patience.

Generosity

It is encouraged for us to be extra generous during the last ten nights of Ramadān, without being extravagant or ostentatious in our giving. Ibn `Abbās relates: "Allah's Messenger was the most generous of people, and he was at his most generous in Ramadān when Gabriel met with him. He would come to him every night in Ramadān and review the Qur'an with him. Allah's messenger was more generous in charity than a nurturing wind sent from the sky." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2308)]

Al-Nawawī states [*al-Majmū`* (6/398)]:

Generosity and open-handedness are strongly encouraged in Ramadān, especially during the last ten nights. By doing so, we emulate the example of Allah's Messenger as well as of our Pious Predecessors. Also, this month is noble, and good works carried out in this month are more blessed than they are at any other time. Also, in this month, people are preoccupied with fasting and worship, and this distracts them from their livelihood, so they might need some assistance during this time.

The Night of Decree (Laylah al-Qadr)

The Night of Decree is a blessed night, the best night of all. They are the best hours we encounter in our lives. Allah says: “Indeed, We sent it down during the Night of Decree. And what would let you know what the Night of Decree is?” [*Sūrah al-Qadr*: 3-5]

It is a night whose blessings are extolled in Allah’s Book: “*Hā Mīm*. By the Book that makes things clear. Surely We revealed it [the Qur’an] on a blessed night. Surely We ever wish to warn (against evil) – On this night, every wise matter is made distinct. A command from Us; surely We are sending it, a mercy from your Lord. Surely, He is the Hearing, the Knowing.” [*Sūrah al-Dukhān*: 1-6]

The early Qur’an commentators from the Companions and Successors, including Ibn ‘Abbās, Qatādah, Sa’īd b. Jubayr, ‘Ikrimah, Mujāhid make it clear that these verses refer to Laylah al-Qadr, the night in which the Qur’an was sent down.

It is the night in which all affairs are set forth and recorded. Some Qur’an commentators say that the events of the world are presented to the angels on this night. Others say that everything that is decreed to take place in Creation in the upcoming year is duly apportioned and recorded, including who will live and who will die, who is going to find success and who is to fail, who will be happy and who will be sad, who will be mighty and who will be weak, and where there will be famine and drought. Everything that Allah wills to take place that year is set forth.

It appears that the recording of the decrees on this night means that these eternal decrees are transcribed from the Preserved Tablet. Ibn ‘Abbās said: “A man can be walking among the people but he has been recorded among the dead.” Then he recited the verses: “Surely We revealed it [the Qur’an] on a blessed night. Surely We ever wish to warn (against evil) – On this night, every wise matter is made distinct.” [*Sūrah al-Dukhān*: 3-4] Then he said: “The affairs of the world for the one year are made distinct from the rest.”

The Virtues of Laylah al-Qadr

1. It is better than a thousand months. Allah says: ““Laylah al-Qadr is better than a thousand months.” [*Sūrah al-Qadr*: 3]

Mujāhid comments: “Our deeds, our fasts, and our prayers are better in virtue on that night than if we were to observe their like for a thousand months.”

The wisdom behind this night may be that those whose lives are short and those who have been neglectful in the past can get the rewards of those who live long lives engaged in worship by taking advantage of this blessed night.

2. The angels and the Spirit descend. Allah says: “The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the permission of their Lord, with every decree. (This night is) peace, until the rising of the dawn.” [*Sūrah al-Qadr* (4)] The “spirit” refers to the angel Gabriel.

Al-Baghawī writes in his commentary on this verse: “With Allah’s permission, the angels with Gabriel among them descend on Laylah al-Qadr with every blessed and good affair.”

Ibn Kathīr writes in his commentary: “The angels descend in greater number on this night due to the night’s greater blessings. The angels descend when Allah’s blessings descend. They descend when the Qur’an is being recited. They likewise surround a gathering of people who remember Allah’s name, and lower their wings over someone who sincerely seeks after religious knowledge, in respect for him.”

3. It is a night of peace. Allah says: “(This night is) peace, until the rising of the dawn.” [*Sūrah al-Qadr* (5)] Mujāhid comments that “peace” refers to the security that people have from the machinations of Satan during this blessed night. Others explain that “peace” here refers to the goodness and blessings the night holds. This was Qatādah’s view. Some commentators say that when we recite the verse, we should pause on the word “peace”, because it means that the angels descend, giving this salutation.

In any event, it is a call for us, encouraging us to peace, love, and reconciliation. It is a call for us to refrain from abusive behaviour and to draw closer to family, friends, and neighbours in a spirit of goodwill. We need to set aside our animosities, jealousies, and grudges. We should know that peace (al-Salām) is one of

Allah's names, and it is the greeting that Allah has prescribed for His servants.

Those who are unable to purify their hearts from animosity on this night will find it all the more difficult to do so at other times. We cannot have the purest, happiest experience of life unless we can inculcate a sense of peace in our hearts.

4. Whoever observes this night in prayer, believing in Allah and seeking His reward, will be forgiven. Abū Hurayrah relates that the Prophet said: "Whoever spends Laylah al-Qadr in prayer, believing in Allah and seeking His reward, will be forgiven all of his past sins." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (35) and *Sahīh Muslim* (760)]

Ibn Battāl says that "believing in Allah and seeking His reward" means to believe in the sacred duty of fasting Ramadān as well as in the reward we are promised for observing this month in fasting and this night in prayer.

Al-Nawawī elaborates that belief here encompasses the belief that it is true and that the virtues of this night are to be attained. The meaning of "seeking Allah's reward" is to engage in worship on this night solely for Allah's sake, not to be seen by the people nor for any other worldly motive. Prayer refers to the Tarāwīh Prayer, which all scholars agree is a recommended prayer.

Seeking Laylah al-Qadr

It is strongly recommended to actively seek Laylah al-Qadr throughout the month of Ramadān, especially during the last ten nights. Allah's Messenger said: "Seek out Laylah al-Qadr in the odd nights during the last ten nights of Ramadān." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1913) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1169)]

The most likely of these are the odd nights, the 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th, and 29th nights. Ibn `Abbās relates that Allah's Messenger said: "Seek it on the last ten nights of Ramadān, when nine nights remain, then when seven nights remain, then when five nights remain, then when three nights remain, then when only the final night remains." [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1173)]

`Ubādah b. al-Sāmit relates that Allah's Messenger emerged from his home to inform people of the exact night of Laylah al-

Qadr. He was met with two Muslim men having an argument. He said: "I came out to inform you when Laylah al-Qadr is, but those two people were arguing, so knowledge of it was taken from me. That might be for the best. Seek it on the twenty-ninth, the twenty-seventh, and the twenty-fifth nights." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (49)]

This shows us how horrible it is to argue with one another for no good reason, especially when it brings harm. Arguing like that leads to the truth becoming obscured and kept from the people.

Ibn `Umar relates that one of the Prophet's Companions said he saw in a dream that Laylah al-Qadr was one of the last seven nights of Ramadān. Allah's Messenger, upon hearing about it, said: "I see that your dream accords with the last ten nights, for whoever wishes to seek it should do so during the last ten nights." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (2015) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1165)]

Mu`āwiyah relates that the Prophet said: "Laylah al-Qadr is the twenty-seventh night." [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1386)] This is evidence that the twenty-seventh night is the most likely of all nights to be Laylah al-Qadr. Most of the Companions held this view, as did most of the early scholars.

Ubayy b. Ka`b used to swear upon it. `Abd Allah b. Mas`ūd said to him: "Whoever observes prayer the whole year through will be sure to find Laylah al-Qadr."

So Ubayy replied: "I swear by Allah that I know which night it is. It is the night which Allah's Messenger ordered us to observe in prayer. It is the night on the eve of the 27th of Ramadān. Its sign is that the Sun will rise in the morning of that day white without exuding any rays." [*Sahīh Muslim* (762)]

Ibn `Abbās also said: "It is the twenty-seventh night."

It is also related that once `Umar had gathered together the leading Companions, and included Ibn `Abbās among them. Some of those present protested: "He is like one of our sons. Why do you include him among us?"

`Umar replied: "He is a young man with a rational heart and an inquiring tongue." He commended him further to the Companions, then asked them about Laylah al-Qadr. They all agreed that it fell on one of the last ten nights of Ramadān. Then he turned to Ibn `Abbās and asked him.

Ibn `Abbās replied: “I know, or at least think I know, which night it is. It is the twenty-seventh night.

They asked him how he knew this. He replied: “Allah created seven heavens, and likewise seven Earths. He made the week seven days long. He created the human being from seven. [During pilgrimage] Allah has us circumambulate the Ka`bah, walk between Mount Safā and Mount Marwah, and stone the *jamrahs* seven times each.” In this way, Ibn `Abbās concluded that Laylah al-Qadr was the twenty-seventh night. [*Musannaf `Abd al-Razzaq* (7679)]

It seems most likely that Laylah al-Qadr moves from one day to another in various years, but that it most often falls on the twenty-seventh night. However, it might also be the twenty-first night on account of the following hadīth related by Abū Sa`īd al-Khudrī:

The Prophet said: “I was informed of which night it is, but I was made to forget it; so search for it in the odd nights of the last ten nights of Ramadān. In a dream, I saw myself prostrating in mud and water.”

The clouds came on that night and it rained. I was observing i`tikāf on that twenty-first night and I saw the Prophet in his place of prayer. I looked at him when he finished the Morning Prayer and saw that his face was covered with mud and water.” [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (2018) and *Sabīh Muslim* (1167)]

This is evidence that Laylah al-Qadr falls on the twenty-first night.

We should beseech Allah in supplication during Laylah al-Qadr as much as we can, especially the supplication the Prophet taught `Ā`ishah to offer on that night: “O Allah! You are the Pardoner. You Love to pardon. So pardon me.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (3513)]

Likewise, we should be steadfast in offering the Tarāwīh prayer and observing i`tikāf. We should repent to Allah in earnest and engage in as much worship as we can, especially the devotions of the heart. Many people compete in performing conspicuous acts of worship and pay less heed to the inner devotion which is the

essence of worship. Every good deed in the heart brings manifold good to our outward conduct.

The Signs of Laylah al-Qadr

Ubayy b. K`ab related that the Prophet mentioned one of these signs as being that “the Sun will rise in the morning of that day white without exuding any rays.” [*Sahih Muslim* (762)]

Wāthilah b. al-Asqa` relates that the Prophet said: “Laylat al-Qadr is a bright night, neither hot nor cold, in which no meteors are seen.” [*Mu`jam al-Tabarānī al-Kabīr* (139)]

Some people mention other signs which have no basis. They are not true signs, and I mention them only to alert us against them. For instance, al-Tabarī mentions that some people said: “One of the signs of Laylah al-Qadr is that the trees droop until they reach the ground, then they return to their proper positions.” This is certainly untrue.

People say that salt water turns sweet on that night, dogs do not bark, or that light pervades every place, even areas of shadow. All of this is untrue. They contradict the evidence of our eyes as well as our religious teachings. If these supernatural events were to take place every Laylah al-Qadr, they would have provided unequivocal evidence to humanity which would compel everyone to believe. However, Allah commands humanity to worship Him on the strength of their faith in the unseen.

It is not essential to know that it is Laylah al-Qadr to get the full blessings of worshipping on that night. It may be that many of those who are unaware which night it is, but pray and weep and beseech their Lord in earnest, achieve a greater reward with Allah than those who identify the night. What matters is to strive hard and to be sincere in worship.

Laylah al-Qadr will endure until the end of time. Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī asked the Prophet: “O Messenger of Allah! Is Laylah al-Qadr something that happens when the prophets are alive, and then departs when they are gone, or is it something that will endure until the Day of Judgment?”

In the Company of Those Who Fast

The Prophet answered: “It will endure until the Day of Judgment.” [*Sunan al-Nasā’i al-Kubrā* (3427)]

This shows that the Muslim community is favoured and blessed, and that it will endure. Allah extends His mercy to all of His servants. The benevolence and grace He shows to those who are penitent, devout, and humble will always be there until the day He inherits the Earth and everything on it. Indeed, Allah is the Best of Inheritors.

The Month for Asking Forgiveness

It is human nature to make mistakes. Adam was made from clay, and he was instilled with lusts and desires as part of his nature. Allah also created the devils who seek to call the children of Adam to sin and lead them astray. As a result, when people choose to be upright and virtuous, they attain the highest rank possible, above that of the angels. However, they can also fall to the point of being the lowest of the low, comparable to the devils.

It is Allah's favour upon His servants that he is Generous, Oft-Forgiving, Most Kind, and accepts our repentance. He forgives of our sins whatever He wishes, and pardons all of our faults and transgressions if we truly repent for them and desist. One of the greatest acts of devotion that Allah has prescribed for us is to ask Him for forgiveness. The simple act of doing so protects us from sin and its evil consequences.

Allah commands Prophet Muhammad to beseech His forgiveness many times in the Qur'an. For instance, He says: "Know that there is no god but Allah, and seek forgiveness for your sins." [*Sūrah Muhammad*: 19]

Al-Mughīrah b. Shu'bah relates that the Prophet was asked why he would stand in prayer at night until his feet and ankles swelled up, when all his sins had already been forgiven. He replied: "Should I not then be a grateful servant?" [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1130) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2819)]

The Prophet used to fast for so many days in a row that the people thought he would never break his fast. He used to pray from one third to over half the night, and at times almost all of the night. His whole life was a relentless, concerted act of devotion. He was constant in his supplications and constantly being tried. In spite of all that, Allah tells him: "Know that there is no god but Allah, and seek forgiveness for your sins." [*Sūrah Muhammad*: 19]

And He tells him: "Seek forgiveness for your sins (O Muhammad) and glorify your Lord's praises night and day." [*Sūrah Ghāfir*: 55] and: "Seek Allah's forgiveness. Indeed, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." [*Sūrah al-Nisā'*: 106]

The Best Times for Asking Forgiveness

1. After performing an act of worship. This is an important time to beseech Allah for forgiveness. In doing so, we can compensate for the shortcomings in our worship. It also keeps us from becoming conceited and self-satisfied with the worship that we do.

Among the final verses of the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet were: "When the help of Allah and the victory comes, and you see the people entering Allah's religion in crowds, then glorify the praises of your Lord and ask His forgiveness. Truly, He is the Acceptor of Repentance." [*Sūrah al-Nasr*: 1-3]

After the Prophet received these verses, he would say during every prayer: "Glory and praise be to You, Allah our Lord. O Allah, forgive me." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (4967) and *Sahīh Muslim* (484)]

From this, the Companions realised that Allah was telling the Prophet his time on Earth was coming to an end, so he enjoined upon the Prophet to make beseeching forgiveness his final state of affairs. Indeed, one of the last things anyone heard the Prophet saying was: "O Allah, forgive me and let me have the company of the Highest Companion." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (4440) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2444)]

The Prophet used to conclude every act of righteousness by beseeching Allah's forgiveness, like when he broke his fasts and completed his prayers. After completing the pilgrimage, he would start his return trip to Madinah by saying: "We are returning repentant, worshipping and praising our Lord." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (3086) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1345)]

The Prophet spent his life engaging in righteous deeds, and he concluded that life beseeching Allah's forgiveness.

We are supposed to conclude our meetings and assemblies by beseeching Allah's forgiveness, even if everything in the meeting was an act of righteousness.

2. After falling into sin. Allah says: "And those who, when they do an evil thing or wrong themselves, remember Allah and implore forgiveness for their sins – and who forgives sins besides Allah – and then do not knowingly persist in the wrong that they did." [*Sūrah Āl `Imrān*: 135]

The Prophet said: “If any of Allah’s servants commits a sin, then performs ablutions properly, offers two units of prayer, and beseeches Allah for forgiveness, Allah will forgive them.” Then he recited from the Qur’an: “Those who, when they do an evil thing or wrong themselves, remember Allah...” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (406) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1521)]

3. After being heedless. All people make mistakes, and most of them are heedless of what they do, and through their heedlessness the wander further astray. If we consider the Prophet’s example, we find that he was vigilant never to let himself become heedless about beseeching Allah’s forgiveness. He said: “Sometimes I perceive a veil over my heart, and ask Allah for forgiveness one hundred times a day.” [*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (2702)]

The Prophet’s circumstances were very different than those of ordinary folk. The office of prophethood demanded that his heart was ever-present at all times, pure of all base thoughts and constantly focused on his Lord. This is something that most people cannot even imagine achieving. Allah chooses the best of His servants to be His prophets and messengers: “And most surely they were to Us, of the elect, the best.” [*Sūrah Sād:* 47]

When we seek Allah’s forgiveness wholeheartedly, we get it. Allah praises those who seek His forgiveness and promises them that He will forgive them. Of course, part of doing so wholeheartedly is to refrain from the sinful behaviour.

Some of the Pious Predecessors used to say: “If a person’s seeking forgiveness does not result in their abandoning the sinful behaviour, then they are lying about seeking forgiveness.”

By abandoning the sinful act and seeking forgiveness, we can truly hope that Allah will forgive us. As for saying “I seek Allah’s forgiveness” with our tongues, but our hearts are not abandoning the sin, it is still an invocation and a prayer for forgiveness, and one we can hope Allah will answer.

How to Ask for Forgiveness

The best way to ask Allah’s forgiveness is to begin by praising your Lord. Then you should admit your sin and ask Allah to forgive

you. The Prophet said that the noblest supplication for beseeching Allah's forgiveness is as follows:

“O Allah! You are my Lord. There is no God besides You. You created me, and I am your servant, and I honour Your covenant and Your promise as much as I can. I seek refuge with You from the evil that I do. I come to You by Your grace, and I come to You with my sins. So forgive me, for no one forgives sins but You.” [*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (6306)]

The Prophet also said: “Whoever says: ‘I seek the forgiveness of Allah, besides whom there is no God, the Living and Self-Subsisting. I repent to Him,’ their sins will be forgiven even if they had deserted their brothers in battle.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1517)]

Ibn `Umar relates that the Prophet would sometimes say a hundred times in one sitting: “My Lord! Forgive me and pardon my sins. Indeed, You are the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (3434) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1516)]

It is also related that he used to say “I seek Allah's forgiveness” and “My lord, forgive me.”

Benefits of Frequently Beseeching Forgiveness

1. Forgiveness of sins. Allah quotes Noah speaking to his people: “Ask forgiveness from your Lord; for He is Oft-Forgiving.” [*Sūrah Nūḥ*: 10]

2. It is a reason for the rains to fall. Noah continues: “He will send rain to you in abundance” [*Sūrah Nūḥ*: 11]

3. Increase in wealth. Noah continues: “And give you increase in wealth and children.” [*Sūrah Nūḥ*: 12]

4. Prosperity and success. Noah continues: “And provide gardens for you and provide rivers for you.” [*Sūrah Nūḥ*: 12] This expresses the good of this world that Allah provides us. The term “gardens” here refers to worldly provisions as well as the gardens of Paradise in the Hereafter. It also refers to the good that comes as a result of the water Allah provides to the Earth.

5. Increased strength. This comprehends all kinds of strength. As Prophet Hūd said to his people: “O my people! Ask forgiveness of your Lord, then turn unto Him repentant; He will cause the sky to rain abundance on you and will add unto you strength to your strength.” [*Sūrah Hūd*: 52] This includes the inner strength which comes from having peace of mind and a conscience that is free from the burden of sin.

6. A good life. Allah says: “Ask forgiveness of your Lord and turn to Him repentant. He will cause you to enjoy a fair estate until a time appointed.” [*Sūrah Hūd*: 3] Life is good to those who are righteous and God-fearing. It is also good to those who return to Allah in repentance, asking His forgiveness, and compensating for their sins by engaging in good deeds.

7. Relief from hardships. Allah says: “Allah will not punish them while they are asking His forgiveness.” [*Sūrah al-Anfāk*: 33] This is because when we seek forgiveness, it dissuades us from persisting in sin. We are realising and acknowledging our mistakes, not rationalising them.

8. Allah’s mercy. Allah says: “Beseech Allah’s forgiveness, that perchance you will be shown mercy.” [*Sūrah al-Naml*: 46]

9. It atones for the mistakes made when we interact with one another. In the latter part of his life, whenever the Prophet stood up from meeting with people, he used to say: “Glory and praise be to Allah. I bear witness that there is no God but Him. I beseech His forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance.”

The first time he did this, a man asked him: “You have said something you have never said before.”

The Prophet replied: “It atones for whatever happened during the meeting.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (4859)]

10. It placates our fears and worries. The Prophet said: “Whoever asks Allah’s forgiveness often, Allah will give them relief from every worry, make a way out for them from every difficulty, and provide for them from whence they least expect it.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1517) and *Sunan al-Nasā’i al-Kubrā* (10290)]

Ibn al-Qayyim comments in *Zād al-Ma`ād*:

As for the effect that beseeching Allah's forgiveness has on our fears, worries, and difficulties, one thing all rational people from all nations and faith traditions agree upon is that sins and corruption cause anxiety, fear, and depression, as well as diseases of the heart. Indeed, even after the sinful people have had their fill from indulging in sin, the resultant anxiety and worry that remains in their hearts causes them to return to the sin again to ward away those feelings. One of the most notorious sinners penned these verses:

A draught I drank for the pure pleasure of it

And another to cure what the first draught inflicted

Since this is the effect that sins and transgressions have on the heart, the only real cure is to beseech Allah's forgiveness.

It seems that Ibn al-Qayyim is alluding to addiction, which not only relates to alcohol and drug use, but to any habitual sin, like illicit affairs and pornography. This requires appealing to Allah for forgiveness frequently, as well as seeking treatment, engaging in wholesome activities, and keeping good company. Addiction of any kind requires professional help, since addiction itself compels the perpetration of the act, even in the absence of any pleasure. The pleasure of the activity might have been what got the addict started in the first place, but then when it turns into a psychological or physical dependency, the compulsion to do it remains even in the absence of any positive sensation.

The following advice is attributed to Luqmān: "My son, make it your tongue's habit to say: 'O Allah, forgive me,' since there are times during the day that no petitioner is turned down." [*Shu'ab al-Īmān* (1120)]

ʿĀ'ishah said: "Blessed are those who have in their record of deeds that they sought Allah's forgiveness often."

Abū al-Minhāl said: "The best neighbour one can have in the grave is the forgiveness that one had sought from Allah."

Qatādah said: "This Qur'an reveals to you your affliction and its cure. Your sins are your affliction and the cure is to ask Allah's forgiveness."

The Month for Asking Forgiveness

Al-Hasan said: “Ask Allah’s forgiveness frequently, when you are at home, when you are dining, when you are on the road, when you are shopping, and at your gatherings. You never know when Allah will bestow His forgiveness.”

O Allah! We have wronged ourselves greatly, and no one forgives sins but You, so forgive us and have mercy on us. Indeed You are the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

The Full Sisters of Men

Prophet Muhammad said: “Women are the full sisters of men.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (113) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (236)] This authentic hadīth is the basis for the principle that equality between men and women is the default assumption for Islamic legal rulings. Whatever rulings apply to men apply equally to women. This applies to the vast majority of rulings, except where there is specific evidence to indicate otherwise. Women have to fast just like men. They are encouraged in Ramadān to read as much Qur’an as possible, stand in prayer in the late watches of the night, beseech Allah in earnest, and spend in charity for Allah’s sake.

One of the longest chapters of the Qur’an is entitled “The Women”. Many other chapters are named after women, like “Mary”. Other chapters are devoted almost exclusively to women’s issues.

Allah says: “For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah’s praise,- for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and great reward.” [*Sūrah al-Abzāb*: 35]

This verse of the Qur’an was revealed when Umm `Umārah al-Ansariyyah said to the Prophet: “It seems that everything is directed at men. Nothing is mentioned about women.” Afterwards, the above verse was revealed.

Matters of Special Concern to Women in Ramadān

1. Women who are menstruating or have post-natal bleeding do not pray or fast in Ramadān. They make up the missed fasts later on, but they do not make up the prayers. `Ā’ishah relates: “When we were beset by that, we were instructed to make up our fasts but not to make up our prayers.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (321) and *Sahīh Muslim* (335)]

2. Some women use medications to prevent their periods from coming. They want to fast every day of Ramadān without interruption, or ensure they will be able to perform `umrah in Ramadān. However, this should only be done under a doctor's supervision, because of the health risks involved.

3. A woman's prayer in her home is better. Many women go out to the mosques to offer the Tarāwīh Prayer. There is nothing wrong with this. Some women do not recite the Qur'an well and it is easier for them to follow someone else in prayer. Some women find the congregation keeps them alert and focused for a longer time. However, a woman who goes out to the mosque should take care to dress modestly and avoid fragrance. The Prophet said: "Any woman who has been in contact with fragrance should not attend the last prayer at night." [*Sabih Muslim* (444)]

Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalānī comments on this hadīth as follows: "The prohibition of perfume applies to everything else that causes sexual enticement, like attractive clothes, visible jewellery, and ornate designs. The prohibition also applies to mingling with men."

A woman should have her husband's permission. Some women go to the mosque to pray and neglect their small children, even putting their children in danger. It is a mistake for a mother to prioritise supererogatory worship over the obligation of caring for her children, keeping them safe, and instilling in them good values. The same general principle, of course, applies to fathers as well.

4. Backbiting should be avoided. This is especially true in Ramadān. It is a serious affliction and a great sin. Allah says: "And do not backbite one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would detest it." [*Sūrah al-Hujurāt*: 12]

5. Time in Ramadān is valuable. Time is our capital for worshipping our Lord. It is a treasure that all people possess, rich or poor. Those who understand this and appreciate it are the ones who get the most out of their time. Allah says: "Did you think that We had created you in jest, and that you would not be brought back to Us?" [*Sūrah al-Mu'minūn*: 115]

Prophet Muhammad said: "The servant's feet will not move from their place on the day of judgment until he is asked about how

he spent his life, what work he did, how he spent his wealth, and how he used his body.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2417)]

A God-fearing Muslim woman is one who seizes the opportunities *Ramadhān* presents and fills her time with worship and with what brings blessings to her and those around her. She is in charge of her home and responsible for the members of her household.

Traditionally, women spend most of their time in the kitchen during *Ramadhān*. If such a woman makes the most of her time in the kitchen, she will reap the rewards. She should keep up the remembrance and glorification of Allah while she is working, and beseech Allah’s forgiveness, especially as the time of sunset draws near. She should listen to religious programs on the radio while preparing food.

It is important not to go to excess in preparing food for *Ramadhān*. It gets to the point where *Ramadhān* becomes the month of eating and drinking instead of the month of fasting. Some people gorge themselves at night and even fall ill in *Ramadhān* with diseases caused by overeating.

Prophet Muhammad said: “The children of Adam fill no vessel worse than their stomachs. It is sufficient for people to eat enough to keep their backs straight. If you must eat more, then fill a third of your stomach with food, a third with drink, and leave a third for air.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (2380)]

6. Prayer is a constant duty. Some women fast in *Ramadhān* but do not pray. Other women only observe their prayers during the month of *Ramadhān*. However, Allah says the following about prayer: “If they repent, uphold prayer, and pay the charity, then they are your brethren in faith.” [*Sūrah al-Tawbah*: 11] Prayer is one of the pillars of Islam and the central pillar of faith. It is pure foolishness to neglect it, and a severe loss of blessings.

Some young women fall into the habit of sleeping through the Dawn Prayer, waking up only after sunrise. Another bad habit is to sleep from before the time of the Noon prayer until the Afternoon Prayer comes in. These women are safeguarding their fasts, but their *Ramadhān* sleep schedules cause them to miss some of their prayers. Yet, Allah says: “There came after them a generation who

neglected prayers and followed after lusts, so they win meet perdition.” [*Sūrah Maryam*: 59]

A woman has a softer heart and a more emotional disposition. She is more inclined to show compassion. Allah says: “And their Lord wished to replace him with one who was better in purity and nearer in mercy.” [*Sūrah al-Kahf*: 81] Allah replaced their son with a daughter. [*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (4726)]

A Muslim family must hold its female family members – its daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives – in high esteem. They are a means for the family to attain Allah’s mercy, providence, and blessed happiness. Family life should not be a battle of the sexes, but rather a basis for cooperation and mutual support.

The news around the world is replete with stories of domestic violence, where most often the woman is the victim. The woman’s gentleness and weak position makes it easy for her to be denied her rights. In the Middle East, there are fathers who prevent their daughters from getting married just so they can steal their monthly pay checks. If she tries to speak out or complain to the authorities, she is seen as brazen and ill-bred. Speaking about her rights is a problem, and silence is a problem. Many virtuous women are the silent victims of their circumstances.

Daughters are abused physically and mentally, subjected to unrelenting violence, denied an education, and prevented from engaging in needed recreation. This is often a result of discord between the parents or divorce. In many cases, daughters live without their mothers, raised by domestic help who are abusive and do not fear Allah.

The tears of a small child can quite possibly be the reason for Allah’s wrath. Those who perpetrate such sins as well as those who know about them and keep quiet are equally in danger, since it is a Muslim’s duty to enjoin what is right and prohibit what is wrong, especially in cases like these.

There is a hadīth that reads: “Let the weak among you be a means of beseeching Allah in supplication, for indeed you are given your provisions and support on account of those among you who are weak.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (1702) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (2594)] The blessing we receive is intrinsically tied to those who are weak:

children, wayfarers, the indigent, and the poor. A society that transgresses against them is one that courts its own destruction.

The Prophet said: “O Allah, ill will befall those who neglect the rights of the weak: the orphans and the women.” [*Sunan al-Nasā’i al-Kubrā* (9149)]

‘Amr b. al-‘Ās praised the Romans on account of their being the most compassionate to the poor, the orphans, and the weak.

There are many well-established social welfare organizations around the world concerned with the rights of the weak and disenfranchised. It behoves the Muslim world to develop in this direction by establishing effective and strong organizations to protect women, orphans, disabled people, and foreigners from violence and infringements against their rights, whether the source is domestic or public, and whether the infringement is physical abuse, mental abuse, or financial injustice.

‘Umrah in Ramadān

Abū Hurayrah relates that Allah’s Messenger said: “Performing two ‘umrahs is an expiation for the sins that occur between them, and the reward for an accepted Hajj is no less than Paradise.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1773) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1349)]

There is the great reward for undertaking ‘umrah, the lesser pilgrimage to Mecca, at any time of the year. The reward for doing so is multiplied in the month of Ramadān. For this reason, scholars of the Hanafī school of law consider ‘umrah in Ramadān to be a strongly recommended act. They support this with the hadīth where the Prophet asked a woman from Madinah: “What prevented you from embarking on the Hajj pilgrimage with me?”

She replied: “We had two camels. My husband and child took one and left the other for the rest of us to ride on.”

The Prophet then told her: “When the month of Ramadān arrives, go for ‘umrah, because ‘umrah in Ramadān is like accompanying me on Hajj.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1782) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1256)]

What a great achievement it would be for one of us to accompany Allah’s Messenger on Hajj! Think of standing beside him on the Plain of ‘Arafah. Imagine spending the night in his encampment in Muzdalifah and then getting up the next morning to go with him to Minā. What would it be like to circumambulate the House and make the circuits between Mount Safā and Mount Marwah alongside him? The apparent meaning of the hadīth is that our performing ‘umrah in Ramadān is really that significant.

It is wonderful to see the vast number of people who come to Mecca in Ramadān from all over the world to perform ‘umrah. To witness them firsthand or even on television is an amazing experience. It shows how people can come together for the sake of something good. It also shows the strength and global reach of Islam. It prophet Muhammad could see all these people of diverse backgrounds praying together at Allah’s house behind a single imām, bowing when he bows and following his every move, it would certainly please him immensely.

Things to Consider

1. The ruling for `umrah in general and for `umrah in Ramadān. The majority of scholars hold the opinion that performing `umrah in one's lifetime is not a religious obligation at all. This is the view of the Hanafī and Mālikī schools of thought. It is also one of the views expressed by Ahmad b. Hanbal. Al-Shāfi'ī also one time held this view, and it seems to have been his older opinion. The official position of the Shāfi'ī school of law is that `umrah is obligatory upon a Muslim, just like Hajj, once in a lifetime.

The stronger of the two opinions – and Allah knows best – is that `umrah is not an obligation. The Qur'an clearly mentions the obligation of the Hajj without once indicating anything similar for `umrah.

The Prophet further emphasized this by saying: "O people! Allah has enjoined the Hajj upon you, so go for Hajj." [*Sabīh Muslim* (1337)]

He also did so by saying: "Islam is built upon five things: the testimony that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger, the establishment of prayer, the payment of Zakāh, the pilgrimage to the House, and the fast during the month of Ramadān." [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (8) and *Sabīh Muslim* (16)]

As for specific hadīth on the topic of the ruling of `umrah, there are some which indicate that it is obligatory and others that indicate it is not obligatory. However, all of these hadīth have some weakness that can be levied against them.

The strongest evidence in support of `umrah being an obligation is a certain narration of the hadīth where `Ā'ishah asks: "Messenger of Allah! Do women have the obligation of *jihād*?"

The Prophet replied: "Yes, they do, but it involves no fighting: Hajj and `umrah." [*Sunan Ibn Mājah* (2901)]

However, this wording is at variance to the well-known narrations of the hadīth which make no mention of `umrah, like the one found in *Sabīh al-Bukhārī* where `Ā'ishah says: "We see *jihād* as the best of deeds." To which the Prophet replies: "But the best *jihād* is an accepted Hajj." [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (1520)]

This puts into doubt the narration which mentions “`umrah”. It is most likely a mistaken narration. Indeed, all the hadīth discussing whether `umrah is or is not obligatory are weak hadīth. Therefore, the question is best referred back to the default ruling on religious duties in the absence of specific evidence, which is that there is no obligation. Moreover, the rites of `umrah are all included within the rites of Hajj. This is why the Prophet said: “`Umrah is incorporated in the Hajj.” [*Sahīh Muslim* (1218)]

Therefore, we say on the strength of the general evidence that `umrah is a Sunnah. It is not an obligation.

2. Some people neglect their families to perform `umrah in Ramadān. This is a serious problem, because the blessed month of Ramadān is a time for people to show greater concern for their families. It is especially bad for parents to neglect their children during this month.

Unfortunately this is exactly what a lot of parents do. They leave their children behind – because those children are in school – and abandon them for at least half of Ramadān. The children spend these precious days without anyone to look after them and guide them. Younger children miss out on essential aspects of their upbringing. Older children may even fall into sin.

There is another mistake parents make regarding their children. Some parents take their children along with them to Mecca. Then, the father decides to spend his time in seclusion at the Sacred Mosque, leaving his children to languish in the hotel.

This is a serious concern. Children who are left to their own devices in a strange environment can easily get into trouble. How often we see adolescents and young adults behaving badly in Mecca during this sacred month.

It is, without doubt, a good thing for parents to take their children to Mecca. It can be a wonderful, faith-inspiring experience, instilling in them a sense of identity with Islam’s history and with all the nationalities to which Muslims belong. However, this requires parents to be responsible and conscious of their duties to their children, and give them the time, effort and emotional support they need.

Likewise, we find mosque imāms, preachers, and others who are responsible for the welfare of the Muslims in their localities, abandoning the people who depend on them in order to perform `umrah and spend the last ten night of Ramadān in Mecca. It is their duty to spend this important time carrying out their duties to the Muslims in their communities. This is where they will realise the greatest blessings, because they have enormous responsibilities at home. They would understand this if they really considered the objectives and general principles of Islamic teachings with respect to the Muslims' welfare.

Many imāms leave their mosques for protracted periods of time to observe i`tikāf and perform `umrah, not realising how much their congregation needs them in Ramadān to lead the Tarāwīh prayers and the Late Night prayers and manage the mosque's affairs. This month is a very precious time for the community, when they need their imām the most. It is, of course, alright for the imām to leave for a brief time if someone is there to carry out the duties in his stead.

3. Repeating `umrah. It is not related anywhere that Prophet Muhammad or any of his Companions ever performed `umrah more than once on the same trip.

The only exception to this was the case where `Ā'ishah sought permission to make a single `umrah after Hajj because of special circumstances. `Ā'ishah's menstruation started while she was performing Hajj and `umrah together. When her menstruation ended and she completed the rites of Hajj, she complained to the Prophet saying: "Messenger of Allah, everyone is returning home having performed Hajj and `umrah, but I am returning home having only performed Hajj". Thereupon, the Prophet commanded her brother `Abd al-Rahmān b. Abī Bakr to accompany her to Tan'im so that from there she could enter into the state of ihrām for `umrah. So she did so and performed `umrah. [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (1557, 1784, 1785) and *Sabīh Muslim* (1211-1213)]

`Ā'ishah entered into the state of ihrām with the intention of `umrah twice during the same trip. This merely indicates that it is permissible to do so, since the Prophet would not have allowed it otherwise. Indeed, some of the Pious Predecessors have said that it is more virtuous to stay in Mecca praying and offering tawāf than to

go out and return to perform another `umrah. Therefore, it is not recommended to offer multiple `umrah's on a single trip to Mecca, though it is permissible to do so. No one can object to it. Some people come from far away and wish to perform `umrah on behalf of their deceased parents or others. There is no harm in this, even if they perform the two `umrahs close together.

4. A description of `umrah. First, the pilgrims enter the state of ihrām at the designated location on the way to Mecca known as the mīqāt. Then, they enter the Sacred Mosque and perform tawāf by walking seven circuits around the Ka`bah. Then they perform sa`y by walking seven times between Mount Safā and Mount Marwah. After completing these rites, they shave or clip their hair, though shaving is preferable for men. Before departing from Mecca, it is preferable to offer a second tawāf around the Ka`bah, known as the farewell tawāf. While the pilgrims are in Mecca, they should take time for heartfelt reflection after every act of worship in order to maximise the spiritual effects of their stay in Mecca and to keep Allah's munificence and great favour constantly in mind. Allah's mercy is ever near to those who do good.

The Month of Forbearance

In Ramadān, the effects of worship should show in the fasting person's demeanour through good manners, humility, compassion, and acts of kindness. As the Prophet said: "The Most-Merciful one shows His mercy to people who show mercy." [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (1924) and *Abī Dāwūd* (4941)]

One of the most beautiful character traits people can exhibit, in Ramadān or at any time, is forbearance. This is a quality that ameliorates so many difficulties and facilitates so much good, especially in today's trouble-filled and stressful world, with its many demands and opportunities. Indeed, increased opportunities bring increased stress as we strive and compete to achieve our goals. This is why we suffer today from many diseases that were rare in the past, like high blood pressure and diabetes.

Forbearance is our ability to retain our composure when we get upset or angry. It means that we hold back from avenging the wrongs and abuses that we suffer from others. If anger means our "blood boils", then forbearance means that we keep things under control in the heat of the moment and use good sense.

Forbearance is a beautiful and balanced mode of conduct, one that is neither anger nor self-effacement. People who cannot cultivate this quality will always find themselves in one bad state of another. They will either be angry and temperamental, or snivelling and debased.

It is important to distinguish between true forbearance – which shows strength of character – and the forbearance that comes from weakness, disgrace, and inability.

Balance and poise are among the hallmarks of the Islamic faith. Forbearance is a trait that exemplifies balance and the triumph of reason over our passions. As human beings, we have a natural propensity to get angry. It is abnormal to never get angry. However, one whose anger is accompanied by forbearance can come through that anger blameless and unscathed.

Some people have observed that without anger forbearance has no meaning, since people are only described as forbearing when others see how they conduct themselves in anger.

A Muslim should endeavour to show this trait with everyone. The most noble of people are those who stand above tit-for-tat knavery. Those who responds to ignorance with kindness elevate themselves above others. This is not even the case when responding to kindness in kind, since that merely puts both parties on an equal footing.

This is why it is so important that as Muslims, we exhibit forbearance with all people. If our hearts are not strong enough to feel it, we should at least make an outward show of forbearance. This will, in time, grow into true, heartfelt magnanimity. The path to true forbearance begins with awareness, then with composing ourselves, then with a firm resolve, then with a show of patience, than with real patience. At this point, we can reconcile our hearts and show genuine forbearance.

We cannot show forbearance except to those who wrong us. Being good to those who are good to us is not forbearance. As the Prophet said: “A person does not engage in the act of maintaining ties of kinship when dealing with those who respond in kind. The person who is truly maintaining ties is the one who shows compassion to those who cut him off and reaches out to them anyway.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (5991)]

Forbearance is like any other character trait. People are either naturally endowed with it, or they can learn it and make it part of their personalities with effort. Prophet Muhammad said to al-Ashajj ‘Abd Qays: “You possess two qualities that Allah loves: forbearance and patience.”

In some narrations of this event, Ashajj asks: “Is this something I do myself, or is it something Allah has endowed me with?”

Prophet Muhammad then tells Ashajj that Allah made these traits part of his natural disposition, to which Ashajj replies: “Praise be to Allah who placed within me two qualities that Allah and His Messenger love.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (5225)]

Abū al-Dardā', the eminent Companion, advised: "Knowledge comes through learning and forbearance comes through practicing forbearance. Those who seek goodness will be granted it, and those who shun evil will be protected from it."

Al-Ahnaf b. Qays admitted: "I am not a naturally forbearing person, but I make myself show forbearance."

One of Allah's names is al-Halīm, the "Most Forbearing". He sees His servants disobeying Him, but He does not hasten to punish them. He withholds His wrath, though they are deserving of it. Allah says: "If Allah were to punish people for their wrongdoing, He would not leave on the Earth a single living creature: but He gives them respite for a stated term." [*Sūrah al-Nahl*: 61]

The fact that Allah is called the Most Forbearing indicates the nobility of this virtue. "Allah is forgiving, forbearing." [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 225] "Allah is self-sufficient, forbearing." [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 263]

In the Qur'an, the only people Allah describes with this trait are Abraham and his son whom he was willing to sacrifice. Allah says: "Abraham was most tender-hearted, forbearing." [*Sūrah al-Tawbah*: 114] and: "He gave him glad tidings of a forbearing son." [*Sūrah al-Sāffāt*: 101]

When we look at the Prophet's life, we find him to be the most clement and forbearing of all people. He said: "The strong man is not the one who can wrestle others to the ground. The strong man is the one who can restrain himself in anger." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6114) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2609)]

Once a man approached the Prophet and said: "Give me advice." The Prophet replied: "Don't get angry." The man repeated his question many times, and each time the Prophet answered him by saying: "Don't get angry." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (6116)] These few words, in this context, provide us with a wealth of lessons about how we should develop our characters through cultivating good manners and exercising self-control.

Once the Prophet borrowed money from a man, and the man came demanding payment, speaking very harshly. The Companions wanted to respond to the man's harshness, but the Prophet said:

“Leave him alone. The one who has a right to something is allowed to speak.” Then he said: “Give him the likes of which he is owed.”

The Companions replied: “We can only find that which is far better than what he is owed.”

The Prophet said: “Then give it to him. The best of you are those who are best in paying their debts.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (2306) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1601)]

Ibn Mas‘ud tells us about another occasion, saying: “When Allah’s Messenger divided the booty of Hunayn, the people crowded up against him. Then Allah’s Messenger said: ‘Allah sent one of His servants to a people and they rejected him and wounded him in the head. He wiped the blood from his brow, saying: ‘O Allah, forgive my people for they do not know.’”

‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud added, “I can almost see Allah’s Messenger now, telling about the man wiping his brow.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (3477) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1792)]

The Prophet exhibited the greatest degree of forbearance with those who acted in ignorance towards him. Anas b. Mālīk relates: “While I was walking with the Prophet who was wearing a Najrānī outer garment with a thick hem, a Bedouin came upon the Prophet and pulled his garment so violently that I could see the impress of the hem of the garment on his shoulder. Then the Bedouin said, ‘Order for me something from Allah’s bounty which you have.’ The Prophet turned to him and smiled, and ordered that a gift be given to him.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (3477) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1792)]

Once ‘Ā’ishah asked the Prophet: “Did you ever face a day more severe and intense than the Battle of Uhud?” He replied:

Yes. I was subjected to worse things by your countrymen. The very worst I suffered from them was on the day of ‘Aqabah when I went to Ta‘if to present Islam to Ibn ‘Abd Yalīl ibn ‘Abd Kulāl. He did not respond to me as I had hoped, and I had to flee from Ta‘if in pain and distress. I did not recover until I arrived at Qarn Al-Tha‘ālib.

There, I raised my head and saw a cloud which had cast its shadow over me. I saw in it the angel Gabriel who called to

me and said: “Indeed, Allah, the Exalted, heard what your people said to you and the response they made to you, and He has sent you the angel in charge of the mountains so you can command him to do to them what you wish.”

Then the angel of the mountains called to me, greeted me and said: “O Muhammad, Allah listened to what your people said to you. I am the angel of the mountains, and my Lord has sent me to you so that you may give me your command. If you wish, I will bring together the two mountains that stand opposite each other at the extremities of Makkah to crush them in between.”

But I said: “No. I hope that Allah will raise from among their descendants people who will worship Allah alone, and not ascribe to Him any partners in worship. [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (3231) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1795)]

Forbearance was a virtue shown by that best of all generations, the generation of the Prophet’s Companions. Once a man came and insulted Ibn ‘Abbās. Ibn ‘Abbās turned to his ward ‘Ikrimah and said: “Does this man have a need we can fulfill?” At hearing this, the man hung down his head in shame.

Ibn ‘Umar used to say: “We of the tribe of Quraysh used to regard generosity and forbearance as the hallmarks of nobility, and we used to regard chastity and wealth management as signs of manliness.”

When the Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb learned that his subjects were complaining about some of his deputies, he summoned them. When they came to him, he stood to address them, beginning by praising and glorifying Allah. Then he said: “People, as our subjects, you have a duty towards us: to give us advice in private and to assist us in doing good. My deputies, as officials, your likewise have a duty to your subjects. Know that nothing is more beloved and dear to Allah than a leader who shows forbearance and kindness. There is no form of ignorance that Allah hates more than the ignorance and tyranny of a leader.”

‘Umar b. al-Khattāb also said: “Study to acquire knowledge, and learn composure and forbearance for the sake of knowledge.”

ʿAlī b. Abī Tālib said: “Goodness is not in having lots of wealth and children. Goodness is in possessing a lot of knowledge, showing extraordinary forbearance, and never showing off to others in your worship. Whenever you do something good, you praise Allah, and when you do something bad, you beseech His forgiveness.”

Ibn Masʿūd said: “Those who possess the Qurʾan need to weep heartfelt tears, and be wise, forbearing and composed. It is wrong for those who possess the Qurʾan to be crass, neglectful, boisterous, and harsh.”

Muʿāwiyah b. Abī Sufyān said: “A servant of Allah does not attain true good sense until his forbearance vanquishes his ignorance and his patience vanquishes his lusts. No one will attain this except through the strength of his forbearance.”

ʿAmr b. al-Ahtam was once asked which men were the most courageous. He said: “Those who repel ignorance with forbearance.” He was then asked which men were the most generous. He said: “Those who spend what they have of this world for the sake of the next.”

ʿArābah b. ʿAws was asked: “How did you become the leader of your people?” He replied: “I was forbearing with their ignorance. I was generous to those who asked. I hastened to help them when they were in need. Whoever acts in the way I do is my equal. Whoever acts better is my superior. Whoever does less than I do, then I am better than them. Whoever does more is better than me.”

He also said: “You should show forbearance and patience until you get your chance. Then when you get your chance, you should show forgiveness and generosity.”

Once a man spoke harsh words to this eminent chief, and the people advised him to punish him, ʿArābah b. ʿAws just said: “I do not wish for my forbearance to fall short of the misbehaviour of one of my subjects.”

Tāʾūs said: “No container carries knowledge better than the container of forbearance.”

Al-Hasan al-Basrī commented on the verse of the Qurʾan which reads: “And if the ignorant people address them, they respond by saying ‘Peace.’” [*Sūrah al-Furqān*: 63] He said: “When

forbearing people are treated in an ignorant manner, they do not act ignorantly in turn.”

‘Alī b. al-Husayn was once insulted by a man who took off his shirt and hurled it at his face. In response, ‘Alī b. al-Husayn ordered that the man be given a thousand pieces of silver. Someone commented on this incident saying: “He managed to make five noble gestures at once. He showed forbearance. He waived his punishment. He rid the man of what would have alienated him further from Allah. He caused the man to feel regret so he would be inclined to repent. He won praise after an insult. He accomplished all this by spending a little bit of worldly wealth.”

Ramadān is a time to learn how to be forbearing. Some people have a tendency to get angry. They are quick to anger and take a long time to calm down. They raise their voices and their hands, and they say things that should never be said. They behave this way with their families, co-workers, and subordinates. They sometimes deceive themselves that their behaviour is motivated by righteous indignation. However, we are only really supporting the truth when we follow the Prophet’s Sunnah, which teaches us to show the best of manners and to refrain from harshness in our dealings with others. We need to win over people’s hearts.

Anger can make two blood brothers shun each other for years on end on account of a small misunderstanding or family dispute. Then no effort on the part of family and friends can reconcile them. However, if fasting, reading the Qur’an, remembering Allah, and prayer cannot placate our egos, break through our obstinacy, and reconcile our hearts, then what is the meaning of our fasts?

Voluntary Fasts

We should all have some voluntary fasts to our credit. The Prophet said: “Nothing that my servant draws near to me with is more beloved to me than what I have commanded. Then, my servant continues to draw near to me with voluntary worship until I love him, and when I love him, I become his hearing that he hears with, his sight that he sees with, his hand by which he grasps, and his feet by which he walks. If he asks me anything, I will grant it to him, and if He seeks my help, I will help him.” [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (6502)]

This noble hadīth shows us that when we hasten to engage in voluntary worship seeking nearness to Allah, Allah will love us and bring us closer to Him. He will be with us and He will bless us in what we see and hear. He will answer our supplications and protect us from the things we fear. Truly, Allah is sufficient for all of our needs.

Fasting is one of the most beloved acts of worship to Allah. Prophet Muhammad said: “Whenever a servant fasts a single day for Allah’s sake, Allah will remove him from the Hellfire by a distance of seventy years.” [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (2840) and *Sabīh Muslim* (1153)]

Observing a voluntary fast for one day raises our spiritual status and is rewarded with Allah’s love. Making voluntary fasting a habit brings immense blessings and rewards. There are a number of recommended voluntary fasts that we can observe.

Fasting in the Month of Muharram

Prophet Muhammad said: “The best prayers after the obligatory prayer are the prayers you offer in the middle of the night. The best fasts after the month of Ramadān are the fasts offered in Allah’s month Muharram.” [*Sabīh Muslim* (1163)]

He also said: “The best fasts after Ramadān are the ones you offer in the month you call Muharram.” [*Musnad Ahmad* (8026)]

Fasting in the Month of Sha`bān

`Ā'ishah relates: "The Prophet never fasted more in any month more than he did in Sha`bān. He would fast for almost the whole month." [*Sahīh Muslim* (1156)]

Usāmah b. Zayd noticed that the Prophet fasted more in Sha`bān than he did in any other month outside of Ramadān, and he asked him about it. The Prophet explained: "This is the month between Rajab and Ramadān that people neglect. It is the month in which deeds are raised up to the Lord of All the Worlds, and I like to have my deeds raised up while I am fasting." [*Sunan al-Nasā'ī* (2357)]

Fasting Six Days in Shawwāl

Prophet Muhammad said: "Whoever fasts the month of Ramadān and then follows it with six days of fasting in the month of Shawwāl, it will be as if he had fasted the year through." [*Sahīh Muslim* (1163)]

Fasting on the Day of `Āshūrā'

Ibn `Abbās relates: "I never saw the Prophet pay more attention and concern for a day for fasting than he did for the day of `Āshūrā' and the month of Ramadān." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (2006)]

The Prophet said: "I hope from Allah that observing the fast of `Āshūrā' will expiate for the sins of the past year." [*Sahīh Muslim* (1162)]

Fasting on Mondays and Thursdays

When the Prophet was asked about fasting on Monday, he said: "It was the day in which I was born and the day in which revelation first came to me." [*Sahīh Muslim* (1162)]

Both Hafsaḥ and Abū Hurayrah relate: "Allah's Messenger used to fast on Mondays and Thursdays." [*Sunan al-Nasā'ī* (2367) and *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (1740)]

ʿĀ'ishah relates that the Prophet used to pay special attention to his observance of fasts on Mondays and Thursdays. [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (745) and *Sunan al-Nasā'ī* (2360)]

When the Prophet was asked why he usually fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, he said: “Deeds are presented every Monday and Thursday, and Allah forgives every believer, except for two who are shunning each other in anger. He says: ‘Leave them for later.’” [*Musnad Ahmad* (8361)]

Fasting the Three Days in the Middle of the Month

The Prophet said: “If you offer fasts for three days in a month, then fast the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth days. [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (761) and *Sunan al-Nasā'ī* (2424)]

Fasting Every Alternate Day

The Prophet said: “The most beloved fast to Allah is the fast of David. He used to fast one day and refrain from fasting on the next. The most beloved prayer to Allah is the prayer of David. He used to sleep half the night, observe prayer for a third of the night, and then sleep for the remaining sixth.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1131) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1159)]

Prohibited Fasts

1. The Days of Eid. It is forbidden to fast on Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adhā. Prophet Muhammad said: “There are two days when fasting is not allowed: The day of al-Adhā, and the day of al-Fitr when we stop fasting after Ramadān.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1197) and *Sahīh Muslim* (827)]

2. Singling out Friday. ʿUbbād b. Jaʿfar asked Jābir b. ʿAbd Allah whether the Prophet forbade fasting on a Friday. Jābir was making tawāf around the Kaʿbah at the time. Jābir replied: “I swear by the Lord of this House that he did forbid it, if it is being singled out for fasting.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1984) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1143)]

3. Fasting on the day of doubt. This is the thirtieth day of the month of Shaʿbān. If the first crescent moon is not sighted on

the twenty-ninth night, people doubt whether the next day is the first of Ramadān or the last day of Sha`bān. This is why it is called the day of doubt.

Once on the thirtieth of Sha`bān, `Ammār b. Yāsir prepared a roasted sheep for the people to eat. Some of the people declined, saying that they were fasting. `Ammār said: "Whoever fasts on the day of doubt has disobeyed the Prophet." [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (686) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (2334)]

4. Perpetual fasting. This is to fast continually without breaking the fast. The Prophet said: "There is no fast for the one who fasts perpetually." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1977) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1159)]

In one narration it reads: "There is no fast for the one who fasts perpetually. Fasting three days every month is as good as fasting perpetually." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1979) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1159)]

As for the hadīth which prohibits fasting on Saturday, it reads: "Do not fast on Saturdays except a fast that you are obligated to observe. If any of you cannot find anything to eat other than grape stalks or the twigs of a tree, then let him chew it."

This hadīth is defective, as determined by many hadīth scholars. Malik says: "This is a lie." Abū Dāwūd says: "It has been abrogated." Al-Nasā'ī says that its narration suffers from inconsistency.

Moreover, it contradicts with an authentic hadīth where the Prophet said: "Do not fast on Friday unless you fast the day before it or the day after it." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1985) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1144)] The day after it is, of course, Saturday.

Zakāh al-Fitr

Zakāh al-Fitr is sometimes referred to as Sadaqah al-Fitr. In both cases, it means “the charity for breaking the fast.” This is because it is paid at the end of Ramadān, when the season of fasting has come to a close. The name Zakāh al-Fitr may also refer to the *fitrah*, the natural way, as mentioned in the verse: “...the natural way (*fitrah*) which He has made for mankind.” [*Sūrah al-Rūm*: 30]

It is not a tax on a person’s wealth. It is paid on behalf of each individual, like a head tax. Indeed, it is sometimes called *zakāh al-ra’s*, (i.e. “the head tax”) or *zakāh al-badan* (“the body tax”).

The Wisdom behind Zakāh al-Fitr

It purifies the fasting person of the shortcomings in his or her observance of the Ramadān fast. No one’s fast is perfect in every way. We all say things or do things that we should not say or do. We may speak ill of another person during the course of the month. We may look at something we are not supposed to.

This Zakāh helps the poor people enjoy the Eid with everyone else. This is why it is paid on the morning of the Eid or the night before. The Eid is a time of joy, a time of celebration. It is a day for feasting and wearing new clothes. When we pay Zakāh al-Fitr at this time, it gives the poor people a sense of belonging by including them in the festive spirit of the day. They should not have to spend this day hungry. They should not feel deprived or left out.

This is why many scholars, including Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn al-Qayyim, say that Zakāh al-Fitr should only be given to the poor and destitute, and not to the other classes of people who are generally eligible to receive charity.

Finally, Zakāh al-Fitr helps to cultivate the habit of giving among the members of society. This is another reason why the obligation of paying this form of charity is connected with each and every capable individual, regardless of how much wealth that person has.

The Ruling of Zakāh al-Fitr

It is a point of unanimous consensus among Muslim legal scholars that paying Zakāh al-Fitr is a religious obligation. This has been asserted by Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Bayhaqī, and Ishāq b. Rāhawayh, among others. The evidence for this is as follows:

1. Allah says: “He indeed shall be successful who purifies himself, glorifies the name of his Lord, and prays.” [*Sūrah al-A`lā*: 14-15] Ibn `Umar interpreted this verse as referring to Zakāh al-Fitr.

2. Ibn `Umar relates that the Prophet obliged the payment of *Zakāh al-Fitr* as a *sā`* of dates or barley on behalf of every Muslim man and woman, free or slave. It is to be paid before the people go out for prayer.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1053) and *Sahīh Muslim* (984)]

Zakāh al-Fitr is an obligation on those who are able to pay it. This is defined as someone who has enough to eat for one day and night. It is paid as a quantity of food. The measure used is the *sā`*. It is a measure of capacity (volume) that equals four double-handfuls of an average person’s hands.

How is It to Be Paid?

Abū Sa`īd al-Khudrī relates: “We used to pay Zakāh al-Fitr as a *sā`* of wheat or barley, or dates, or dried cheese, or raisins.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1435)]

The vast majority of scholars from the time of the Companions and Successors, agree that we are not restricted to the specific food items mentioned in the hadīth. It is permissible to pay it in any staple food of the locality. This might include rice or any other local staple.

Scholars disagree as to whether money can be paid in lieu of food. The majority of scholars hold the view that Zakāh al-Fitr cannot be paid in cash. This view is the one adopted by the Mālikī, Shāfi`ī and Hanbalī schools of law.

The Hanafī school of law follows Abū Hanīfah’s opinion that it is permissible to pay Zakāh al-Fitr in cash. This was the opinion of a number of eminent Successors, including the Caliph `Umar b. `Abd al-`Azīz. Al-Hasan al-Basrī said: “There is no problem with

paying Zakāh al-Fitr in silver coins.” [*Musannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah* (10368 and 10370)]

Ishāq al-Subay`ī said: “I found them paying this charity in silver coins to the value of the food.” [*Musannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah* (10371)]

This was the view of al-Thawrī and `Atā'. Indeed, `Atā' was known to pay his Zakāh al-Fitr in cash. All of these people were among the most distinguished Successors.

Recently, the scholar Mustafā al-Zarqā has come forth as a strong supporter of this point of view. He defends this position with the following strong arguments, among which are the following:

1. Most jurists see no problem with paying Zakāh al-Fitr in whatever foods are locally used, even though most of these foods are not mentioned in the hadīth. This is why they see it as permissible to pay it in rice or maize or whatever else is locally eaten as a dietary staple. If these foods that are not mentioned in the Sunnah are permitted, then it makes more sense to permit paying it in cash, since this is more useful to many poor people on the day of Eid. This is not really different than what the people do who pay in their local food. We determine the equivalent value of those foods in cash. They determine the equivalent of those foods in their local staples.

2. The enumeration of those foods is not a matter of pure, abstract worship that cannot be departed from. There is a clear benefit intended from them. The purpose of Zakāh al-Fitr is to help the Muslims. It helps the poor to enjoy the Eid and participate in celebrating the successful completion of the month of fasting with the rest of the Muslims. It also helps the giver in that it is a charitable act. The giving of money – which can be dearer to both the giver and recipient – realizes the purposes of Zakāh al-Fitr. It helps the poor and purifies the giver, and it does not contradict any explicit text.

This question is a detail of Islamic Law about which some of the greatest scholars disagreed since the earliest days of Islam. Among them was the caliph `Umar b. `Abd al-`Azīz who enjoined upon his subjects to pay Zakāh al-Fitr in cash.

Our purpose in mentioning the difference of opinion in this matter is to show that there is flexibility. There is no reason to be rigid and dogmatic. Islamic Law seeks to facilitate matters and to ease things for the people.

When Must It be Paid?

It becomes incumbent at the time the people break their fasts at the end of Ramadān. This is why it is called the charity for breaking the fast. Its name refers to its rationale. Some jurists, including al-Shāfi`ī, Ahmad, Ishāq, and Mālik, pinpoint the time of obligation at sunset on the night before the `Īd, while Abū Hanīfah says that it becomes incumbent on Eid morning right before the prayer.

Ibn `Umar relates: “It is to be paid before the people go out for prayer.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (1053) and *Sahīh Muslim* (984)]

Likewise, the Prophet said: “Whoever pays it before the prayer, then it is accepted as Zakāh. Whoever pays it afterwards, it is ordinary charity.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd*: 1371]

Everyone, therefore, agrees that the correct time to pay it is after the Morning Prayer and before the Eid Prayer.

It is also permissible to pay Zakah al-Fitr a day or two before the Eid, because Ibn `Umar relates: “They used to sometimes pay it a day or two before the end of fasting.”

Who Is Entitled to It?

There are two opinions on this matter:

1. It can be paid to all eight categories of people who are eligible to receive Zakāh. This is the majority view. Indeed, al-Shāfi`ī goes further and argues that it should be divided up and distributed to all eight categories.

2. Only the poor and destitute are entitled to receive it. This is one of the opinions of the Hanbalī school of law, and it is the opinion adopted by Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn al-Qayyim.

The second opinion seems to be the best, since the Prophet once described it as a Zakah paid “to provide food for the poor.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1609)]

Moreover, Zakāh al-Fitr is different than the general Zakāh in that it is not levied on a person’s wealth, but taken equally from each and every person. It, therefore, seems more suitable for it to be restricted to the poor and needy.

Upon Whom Is It Levied?

Since it is a head tax and not a tax on wealth, the person who pays Zakāh al-Fitr must do so first for on his or her own account and then for all of his or her dependents. A man, for instance would pay on behalf of his dependent wife and his children. He would also have to pay it on behalf of his parents if they are dependent on him to provide for them.

Zakāh al-Fitr does not have to be paid on behalf of an unborn child. However, it is preferable to do so, especially if the pregnancy is at an advanced stage where the soul has already been breathed into the child. It is narrated that `Uthmān paid Zakāh al-Fitr on his unborn child. At the same time, a number of Companions stated that it is not obligatory for him to do so.

The Six Days of Shawwāl

Abū Ayyūb al-Ansārī relates that Prophet Muhammad said: “Whoever fasts the month of Ramadān and then follows it with six days of fasting in the month of Shawwāl, it will be as if he had fasted the year through.” [*Saḥīḥ Muslim* (1163)]

The month of Shawwāl is singled out for the observance of extra fasts, since this month follows immediately after Ramadān. The six days of voluntary fasting are to the obligatory fast of Ramadān what the Sunnah prayers are to the obligatory prayers.

The Prophet said: “The fast of Ramadān is like observing ten months of fasting. Fasting six days of Shawwāl is like observing two months of fasting. This together is like fasting throughout the year.” [*Sunan al-Nasā’ī al-Kubrā* (2860)]

Al-Nawawī observes in his commentary on the hadīth: “Scholars have explained that it is like observing a year of fasting, because the reward of one’s good deeds are multiplied tenfold. Therefore fasting the month of Ramadān is like fasting for ten months and fasting six days in the month of Shawwāl is like fasting for two months.”

Virtues of Fasting Six Days in Shawwāl

1. Fasting six days in Shawwāl after observing the Ramadān fast gives the person the reward of fasting throughout the year.

2. The fasts of Shaʿbān and Shawwāl are like the Sunnah prayers that accompany the five obligatory prayers. Like the Sunnah prayers, these extra fasts cover up for the deficiencies in our performance of our obligatory worship. Our voluntary acts of worship will compensate for the shortcomings in how we carried out our duties.

3. Our return to the habit of fasting right after Ramadān is a sign that our Ramadān fasts were accepted. When Allah accepts our worship, He blesses us to engage in further acts of piety. The saying goes: The reward of virtue is further virtue.

4. Fasting Ramadān brings forgiveness for our past sins. The fasting people are given their recompense of the day of Eid al-Fitr, the day when the fast is rewarded. Getting into the habit of fasting again soon thereafter is a way to give thanks to Allah for the blessings we have received. There is no blessing greater than forgiveness for one's sins. Indeed, Allah has commanded us to give thanks for the blessings of the Ramadān fast and to do so by making mention of Him and through other means of giving thanks. Allah says: "(He wants you) to complete the number of days, and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance you may give thanks." [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 185]

Fasting these days in Shawwāl is one way for us to express our thanks for Allah blessing us in our observance of the Ramadān fast. It is known that some of the Pious Predecessors would try to get up at night to pray the Tahajjud prayer. When Allah blessed them to wake up and do so, they would fast the next day in thanks to Allah for blessing them to observe that prayer.

Once Wuhayb b. al-Ward was asked about the blessings of various acts of devotion and he replied: "Do not ask about the blessings that can be earned by performing these acts of worship. Rather, ask how you can show your thanks to Allah if He blesses you to perform them, for He is the one who assists us in doing so."

Every blessing that Allah gives us is something that we have to be thankful for. Moreover, when Allah blesses us to show thanks, this is a further blessing from Allah that deserves further thanks from us. If we show further thanks, this in turn is another blessing deserving our gratitude. There is no end to this and we can never be thankful enough. When we recognize that our thanks is never enough, this is the highest expression of gratitude we can give.

It is a strongly recommended act to fast six days in the month of Shawwāl. This is the opinion of al-Shāfi'ī, Ahmad b. Hanbal, and Ishāq al-Rāhawayh. This opinion has also been related from Ibn 'Abbās, Ka'b al-Ahbār, Tāwūs, al-Sha'bī, Maymūn b. Mahrān, and Ibn al-Mubārak. They base their opinion upon the hadīth that we have discussed above.

Others have regarded fasting six days in the month of Shawwāl to be something disliked. This view has been related from Mālik and Abū Hanīfah. They feared that the general public might

misconstrue fasting these six days as something obligatory. They also saw it as emulating the People of the Scripture by exceeding the number of fasting days in the prescribed month of fasting.

However, these objections are spurious in the face of the clear statements of the Prophet that encourage this fast. If we were to abandon a Sunnah act on the grounds that we are exceeding what is obligatory, then we would have to abandon all recommended fasts, including the fast of ‘Ashūrā’ and the fast of the middle of the month.

It has been related that Mālik used to personally fast six days in Shawwāl. Also, later Hanafī scholars decided that there is no objection to fasting these days. The Mālikī jurist Ibn ‘Abd al-Bar explains Mālik’s stance:

Mālik did not know of the hadīth related by Abū Ayyūb al-Ansārī, even though it is a hadīth from the people of Madīnah. No one possesses all the knowledge held by others. Mālik explained and clarified what he disliked about it. He was afraid that it would be added to the obligatory fast of Ramadān by the general public. Mālik was extremely cautious when it came to matters of religion.

As for fasting six days in the month of Shawwāl to seek extra blessings – as Thawbān depicts it – this is something that Mālik had no objection to, since fasting is a person’s protective shield and its virtues are well-known. When we give up our food and drink for Allah’s sake, it is a virtuous and good deed. Allah says: “Engage in good works that perchance you will be successful.” [*Sūrah al-Hajj*: 77]

How We Should Fast the Six Days of Shawwāl

There are various opinions about this question:

1. Some scholars hold the view that it is preferable to fast the six days in consecutive order, starting from the second day of Shawwāl. This is the view of al-Shāfi‘ī and Ibn al-Mubārak.

2. Others are of the opinion that it makes no difference whether you fast the six days consecutively or intermittently,

spreading them out throughout the month of Shawwāl. This is the position of Ahmad b. Hanbal and most other scholars.

3. Then there are those who hold the view that the days should all be postponed until later in the month and not close to the day of Eid, which is a time of celebration and feasting. They prefer fasting the three days in the middle of the month (*ayyām al-bīd*) along with the three days right before or after. This is the opinion of Ma`mar and `Abd al-Razzāq.

There is considerable flexibility in all of this. We can choose to follow any of these approaches we wish.

Another crucial question is whether a person who has missed days in Ramadān on account of sickness or other reasons can fast the six days of Shawwāl before making up those missed fasts. This is a matter in which Islamic scholars have differed.

Some scholars say that the missed days of Ramadān must be made up first. They argue that the Prophet said: “Whoever fasts the month of Ramadān and then follows it with six days of fasting in the month of Shawwāl, it will be as if he had fasted the year through.” [*Saḥīḥ Muslim* (1163)] In their view, people who have to make up days in Ramadān have not completely “fasted the month of Ramadān”, so they are not eligible for the special reward of fasting the six days of Shawwāl until after they make up those missed days.

Other scholars are of the opinion that the special blessings for fasting the six days of Shawwāl are there for those who had a valid excuse to miss days in Ramadān. Consequently, they can observe these six days before making up the missed days. This is the view of a number of leading scholars, including Ibn Hajar al-Haytamī, Ibn Muflīh, and al-Bahūtī.

Their argument is that these six days have a specific timeframe, whereas the timeframe for making up missed days in Ramadān is far wider. It is not required to make up those missed days in the month of Shawwāl. Allah says: “They should make up that number on other days.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 184]

Moreover, the Prophet knew that many people would have to make up missed days in Ramadān when he said: “Whoever fasts the month of Ramadān and then follows it with six days of fasting in

the month of Shawwāl...” If making up those missed days had been an issue, he would have brought it up.

In consideration of these various opinions, those who can make up their missed days first and still fast the six days of Shawwāl should certainly do so. In this way, they fulfill all their obligations and obtain the blessings. However, those who have missed many days and cannot make them all up in the month of Shawwāl in addition to fasting the six days without great difficulty have an excuse to offer the six days of Shawwāl first. In this way, they realize the special blessings of fasting on those days and they can make up the days they missed in Ramadān later on. This is because they only broke their fasts in Ramadān for a valid reason.

There is considerable evidence that people with legitimate excuses receive the full blessings for their worship. For instance, when the Prophet approached Madinah on his return from the Tabūk campaign, he told those who were with him: “There are people in Madinah who have not travelled any length, nor traversed any valley, but they were with you.” They asked him how this could be the case when those people had remained behind in Madinah. The Prophet replied: “They were in Madinah because they were prevented from leaving by an excusable hindrance.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (4161) and *Sahīh Muslim* (1911)]

Some Issues Related to the Six Days of Shawwāl

1. Some people take the eighth day of Shawwāl as a religious holiday. They refer to it as Eid al-Abrār, or the Day of the Righteous. There is no basis for this in Islamic teachings.

2. Some people believe that if they fast the six days of Shawwāl in one year, they are obliged to continue doing so every year for the rest of their lives. This is incorrect. It is completely optional. The Prophet said: “The one who offers a voluntary fast is in charge of himself. If he wishes to he can fast, and if he wishes to he can break his fast.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (732)] Moreover, those who fast for less than six days get the reward and blessings for the days they fast.

When we fast for six days in Shawwāl, it shows that we have affection for fasting and that we are eager to engage in voluntary

The Six Days of Shawwāl

worship after fulfilling our religious obligations. May Allah accept our fasts and help us to engage in righteous deeds.

Eid al-Fitr

The Arabic word for holiday (*`īd*) literally means something that returns, or that is customary and habitual. All nations and cultures have their unique holidays. This is because the desire to have holidays is part of human nature. People love to have occasions of joy to celebrate the present and commemorate the past.

Many non-Muslim civilizations have holidays connected with worldly events, like the birth of their nation, the fall of another, the coronation or marriage of a king, or the turn of the seasons.

They also have religious holidays. For instance, both the Jews and Christians have holidays that are uniquely their own. The Jews have Chanukah and Passover. The Christians have Christmas and Easter which are celebrated in all of the countries of Europe and the Americas as well as everywhere else the Christians have a presence, even in countries that are not predominantly Christian.

As for the Muslims, they have only two holidays. These are Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adhā. They have no others. When the Prophet arrived in Madinah, he found that the inhabitants of that city had two festive days wherein they would play and enjoy themselves. The Prophet said: “Allah – Most Blessed and High – has replaced these with what is better: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adhā.” [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (1134) and *Sunan al-Nasā’ī* (1556)]

These two holidays – Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adhā – have been prescribed for us by Allah. They are among the most conspicuous symbols of Islam. The Muslims should be eager to observe these days and bring to mind what these days mean to us.

Some Rulings for the Day of Eid

1. It is forbidden for a Muslim to observe a fast on the day of Eid. Abū Sa`īd al-Khudrī relates to us that the Prophet forbade fasting on two days: the day of Eid al Fitr and the day of Id al-Adhā. [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (1197) and *Sabīh Muslim* (1137)] These are days of feasting and celebration.

2. The prayer is to be attended by men and women alike. Umm `Atiyyah tells us: “Allah’s Messenger commanded us to come out and attend the prayers for Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adhā, even the young maidens among us as well as those who were in seclusion and those who were menstruating. The menstruating women would stand apart from the prayer itself, but they would witness the good event and share in the Muslims’ supplication.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (974) and *Sahīh Muslim*(890)]

We see that even young maidens, women in seclusion, and menstruating women are supposed to attend the Eid prayers. Therefore, we cannot doubt that men are expected to attend. Indeed, some scholars deem it obligatory for men to do so. They cite the hadīth of Umm `Atiyyah as evidence.

3. The Eid service consists of a prayer and a sermon. The prayer comes before the sermon. Ibn `Umar, Abū Sa`īd, and Ibn `Abbās all relate to us that the Prophet used to offer the prayer before delivering the sermon. [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (963) and *Sahīh Muslim* (888)] As a consequence, it is not obligatory to stay for the sermon, but it is strongly recommended.

4. It is preferred for the imām to commence the first unit of the prayer with seven takbīrs and the second unit with five. This is the confirmed practice of a number of Companions, including `Umar, `Uthmān, `Alī, Abū Hurayrah, Abū Sa`īd al-Khudrī, Abū Ayyūb al-Ansārī, and Zayd b. Thābit.

A number of hadīth have been attributed to the Prophet in this regard, but none of them are authentic. However, this practice is authentically established for the Companions. It is also permissible to commence both units of prayer with four takbīrs each. This is the established practice of a number of the Pious Predecessors, including Ibn Mas`ūd. This is the practice adopted by Hanafī scholars.

5. It is preferable for the imam to recite *Sūrah Qāf* in the first unit of prayer and *Sūrah al-Qamar* in the second. Abū Wāfid al-Laythī relates that this was the Prophet’s practice. [*Sahīh Muslim* (891)] It is also related that the Prophet used to recite *Sūrah al-A`lā* and *Sūrah al-Ghāshiyah* in the Eid prayers, just like he would do in the Friday prayers. [*Sahīh Muslim* (878)]

6. There are no supererogatory prayers before or after the Eid prayer. Ibn `Abbās relates that the Prophet went out on the day of Eid and prayed two units of prayer. He prayed nothing else before it or after it. [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (964) and *Sahīh Muslim*(884)]

Some Etiquettes of Eid

1. We should bathe in the morning before going out to attend the Eid prayer. Mālik relates that Ibn `Umar would bathe on the day of Eid al-Fitr before going out to pray. [*al-Muwatta`* (428)] Al-Nawawī asserts that all Islamic scholars agree about the preferentiality of taking a bath before going out for the Eid prayer.

The reason for doing so is the same as it is for the Friday prayer where the Muslims in the community all gather together to offer congregational worship. Indeed, this meaning is even more clear when it comes to Eid. Cleanliness, grooming, and wearing fragrance are desirable for when we engage in the worship of our Lord.

2. We should eat some dates before departing from home to attend the pray for Eid al-Fitr. Anas relates that the Prophet would not depart for the prayer until after he had eaten some dates. [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (953)]

The reason for this is to affirm that we are not fasting on this day after having fasted for the entire month of Ramadān. As for Eid al-Adhā, it is preferred to refrain from eating until after the prayer and to make some of the meat from our sacrificial animal the first food we have.

3. We should recite the special takbīr on the morning of Eid. Allah says: “(He wants you) to complete the number of days, and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance you may give thanks.” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 185]

Regarding the time we should start with the takbīr, the strongest view is that we should begin doing so as soon as we leave from our homes to go to the prayer. It is authentically related that Ibn `Umar used to recite the takbīr when he left from his house to go to the prayer area. [*Musannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah* (5619)]

The other opinion, which is weaker, is that we should start doing so at sunset upon completion of the last day of Ramadān.

The takbīr on the morning of the Eid is a well known practice of the Pious Predecessors. Nāfi` b. Jubayr was surprised to find people neglecting it. He would admonish them, saying: “Will you not make the takbīr?”

Al-Zuhri said: “The people used to recite the takbīr from the time they left their homes until they reached the prayer area and then would continue to do so until the imām came forth to lead the prayer. At that point, they would fall silent. If he said takbīr, then they would do so as well” [*Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah* (5629)]

This means that the timeframe for reciting the takbīr is from the time we leave from our homes to head for prayer up until the time that the imām takes his place in the prayer area.

4. We should greet each other with special Eid salutations. There is no specific wording prescribed for this. We can say any number of permissible greetings, like: saying “Blessed Eid!” and “May Allah accept from you, and from us, the worship we have completed.”

This practice was well-known to the Companions. They would offer each other salutations on every joyous occasion, just like they did when somebody was informed of Allah’s pardon, and in numerous other circumstances. The people of knowledge, like Ahmad b. Hanbal, have always condoned the Eid salutations.

We cannot doubt that these salutations are part of good manners. They are also a good way of strengthening community participation on this auspicious day.

5. Men should put on their best clothes. Ibn `Umar relates that his father `Umar b. al-Khattāb saw a silk cloak being sold near the gate of the mosque, and he said to the Prophet: “I wish you would buy this to wear on Eid and also on the occasions when delegations arrive.”

The Prophet replied: “This will be worn by a person who will have no share (of reward) in the Hereafter.” [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (984) and *Sahīh Muslim* (2068)] The Prophet rejected that particular article of clothing only because it was made of silk. Nevertheless, this

incident shows us that `Umar was well aware that new clothing should be worn on Eid.

Jābir relates that the Prophet had a cloak that he reserved for the Friday prayers and for the two Eid prayers.” [*Saḥīḥ Ibn Khuzaymah* (1765) and *Sunan al-Bayhaqī* (5931)]

Ibn `Umar used to always wear his best clothing for the two Eid prayers. [*Sunan al-Bayhaqī* (5938)]

Therefore, men should wear their very best clothing when they go to attend the Eid prayer. As for women, they should not allow their fine clothes to be seen when they go out of their homes. Women should conceal their finery from the gazes of strange men. Likewise, they should refrain from putting on perfume when they go out to prayer.

Some Issues Related to the Eid

1. Some people believe that they are supposed to spend the entire night before Eid engaged in prayer. They relate the following unauthentic hadīth in support of this practice: “Whoever spends the nights before the two Eids in prayer seeking Allah’s reward, his heart will not perish on the day that hearts shall perish.”

Since this hadīth is not authentic, it is incorrect to specify this night for special acts of worship or otherwise distinguish it from other nights.

As for those who spend most or all of their nights engaged in prayer, it is perfectly fine for them to do so on the night of Eid. What is related from some of the Pious Predecessors that they spent the nights of Eid in prayer needs to be understood in this context. They were generally in the habit of spending their nights in prayer, so when asked about how they spent the night of Eid, of course they spent it in prayer as well.

2. Eid is a day of joy and celebration for our obedience to Allah in the month of Ramadān. Therefore, we should take every care to conduct ourselves morally and exhibit the best manners while we celebrate. We should be generous, dress appropriately, and show proper decorum at all time. We should continue to perform good

deeds and take the opportunity to pardon those who have wronged us.

Allah says: “Let them forgive and overlook. Do you not wish that Allah should forgive you? Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.” [*Sūrah al-Nūr*: 22]

The Joy of Completing Ramadān

The Prophet said: “The fasting person has two occasions for joy, one upon breaking the fast, and the other upon meeting His Lord.” [*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (1904) and *Saḥīḥ Muslim* (1151)]

The joy of breaking the fast comes every night in Ramadān when we complete the day’s fasting, and it comes as well at the end of Ramadān when we complete the entire month. We feel joy at the end of Ramadām for fulfilling our duty to our Lord and for obeying Him. We have a sense of accomplishment, knowing we prevailed over our physical desires seeking Allah’s pleasure. These abstract pleasures are coupled with the physical pleasures of eating and drinking.

Sahl b. Sa’īd said: “We used to feel happy on Fridays. There was an old woman of our acquaintance who used to pull out the *silq* (a kind of vegetable) from its roots and put it in a cooking pot, adding some powdered barley over it, and cook it. After finishing the Friday prayer, we used to visit her, whereupon she would present us with that meal, so we used to feel happy because of that.” [*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (5403)]

They were happy because Friday is the weekly Eid of the Muslims. It is a time for worship, gathering together, and listening to beautiful preaching. Their happiness was bolstered by the meal they enjoyed afterwards given to them by their elderly acquaintance.

The fasting person’s joy will be immense on the day that we meet our Lord and see the great reward that is in store for us. Allah says: “They will rejoice in what Allah has given them out of His grace.” [*Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*: 170]

We feel joy in this world knowing that Ramadān is the month of forgiveness and atonement. We have every hope that Allah will forgive us and give us the strength to avoid sin. This makes Allah happy with us.

Prophet Muhammad said: “Allah is happier with His servant who repents than the happiness one of you would feel if he was wandering in a barren wasteland to find his steed had wandered off with all his food and provisions. Then, after the heat and his thirst

become severe, he falls asleep in the same place and wakes to find his steed standing before him, so that he grabs its reins and says: “O Allah! I am your Lord and You are my servant”, mixing up his words on account of his extreme joy.” [*Sabīh Muslim* (2747)]

Happiness is a natural emotional state we as human being are meant to experience, no less than sorrow. Happiness inspires us to work and be productive, and it allows us to enjoy life. It also inspires us to be grateful to our Lord and thank Him for His blessings.

The people have a short time after Ramadān before the arrival of the Hajj when they again celebrate on Eid al-Adhā. Then they can look forward to the following Ramadān. These are sure and wholesome reasons to rejoice.

We need to make sure to enjoy our lives in an excellent manner, without acting in excessive and inappropriate ways that only bring us back to sadness, fear, and shame. Happiness is not an exceptional state of being that only occurs outside of normal bounds. Quite the contrary, the closer our happiness is connected with what Islam teaches, the more lasting and stable it will be.

Happiness is natural. This is why ‘Ā’ishah enjoyed the Eid and watched the Ethiopian acrobats perform in the mosque, with the Prophet watching the show alongside her. Once during Eid, ‘Ā’ishah’s father Abū Bakr saw that she had two girls with her who were beating on tambourines. Abū Bakr got angry, but the Prophet said: “Abū Bakr, every nation has their, holidays, and this is ours.” [*Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (950) and *Sabīh Muslim* (892)]

The people used to celebrate their holidays in the days of ignorance. Islam did not do away with the joys of celebration and declare them blameworthy. Instead, it replaced their holidays like Nayruz and Mahrajan with the holidays of Islam, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, and encouraged wholesome play and recreation that would make them occasions for joy.

On the days of Eid, the people are supposed to all go out to attend the congregational prayer, men and women alike, young and old. Women should not wear perfume or showy clothes, but they should be in festive spirits, meet with their sisters, and have a deep sense of accomplishment for completing the month of fasting.

We are called upon to give in charity on the two Eids. This enables the poor to enjoy these days and share in the celebration. The Eids strengthen our collective identity and cultivate social cohesion. This cannot happen if there is great material inequality between the members of society, or where there is no affection and no sense of others' suffering.

This should inspire us to forgive one another on the occasion of Eid, visit each other, and rekindle old friendships. Disputes between neighbours should be put aside, and husbands and wives should resolve their problems. Eid is a time for us to come together, to be with our families, play, and have a good time. This is praiseworthy fun.

There are also blameworthy ways to celebrate Eid. This comes as the result of one of two things. The first is to celebrate in ways that are forbidden by Allah. This is like what the people said to Qārūn when he transgressed: "Do not revel in exaltation, for Allah does not love those who exult." [*Sūrah al-Qasas*: 76] He was gleeful in his greed and his abuse of other people's wealth. This is why Allah says: "This is because you used to rejoice in the Earth without right and you used to behave insolently." [*Sūrah Ghāfir*: 75]

The second is to go to excess in celebrating. Excessiveness in joyful things inevitably leads to sorrow. This is because those who exaggerate their joys also exaggerate their sorrows, and their hearts turn very quickly from the state of happiness to that of grief. Excess in celebrating also happens when we take that which is lawful in and of itself and engage in it in a way that it leads us to transgress Islamic teachings. This happens when we fail to keep ourselves in check and lose control of ourselves.

Dealing with Sorrow on Eid

We should follow our Prophet's example in every aspect of our lives. We should think of when Allah said to him: "Have We not expanded for you your heart [O Muhammad], and removed from you your burden which had weighed upon your back?" [*Sūrah al-Sharh*: 1-3]

We should consider when these verses were revealed. The Prophet was in Mecca. It was a time of great pain, hardship and

hostility for him. However, his heart was expanded and his burdens were not sins. Allah had removed the distress, worry, and heaviness from his heart. Indeed, the Prophet used to seek refuge with Allah from stress and worry. [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (2893)] These were the things that had weighed heavily on his back.

If the heartfelt concern for calling people to Allah becomes excessive and unbalanced, it can turn into a nightmare and make the path difficult. The work of calling to Allah becomes ineffective. This chapter of the Qur'an was revealed to treat this problem with a divine promise. Allah says: "For indeed, with hardship comes ease. Indeed, with hardship comes ease." [*Sūrah al-Sharh*: 4-5]

This is a true promise for the future which addresses the present as well. Allah says: "*with* hardship comes ease". He does not say: "*after* hardship comes ease." This means that there is ease which precedes the hardship and then ease which comes along with the hardship. This is double, since Allah mentions it twice. Then there is the ease that comes after the hardship is over, for Allah says: "Allah will bring about ease after hardship." [*Sūrah al-Talāq*: 7] Otherwise, he would not have been able to go on. Inner balance is needed for persistence and fortitude.

The Prophet, therefore, experienced happiness and joy when he was in Mecca, in Madinah, on a campaign, and under every other set of circumstances. It is not recorded in history that the Muslims ever turned the Eid into an occasion for sorrow and pain. They always rejoiced on the Eid as the Prophet had taught them to. The key is to be able to embrace joy, happiness, and elation while being serious about life and its responsibilities.

There has been a tendency among Arab poets to use Eid as a backdrop for their laments and sorrows, wherein they use the device of renouncing any sense of joy. The renowned classical Muslim poet Abū Tayyib al-Mutanabbī – like the pre-Islamic poets before him – upheld this unfortunate tradition when he penned the following pessimistic verses about the Eid:

*O Eid, look at the state in which you find us upon your return!
Do you bring us the past or do you come with something new?*

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*As for our loved ones, they are all long gone;
If only you, O Eid, could be equally far away.*

Since the day these verses were written, it has become the tradition of poets to lament and mourn on the occasion of Eid, even if merely in self pity over their own personal problems, though Allah says: “As for poets, those in error follow them.” [*Sūrah al-Shu`arā`*: 224] Eid should not be turned into an opportunity to confront people with their faults and remind them of their pain. Unfortunately, Muslim poets, often out of religious or cultural zeal, continued this tradition. As a consequence, the Eid changed from being an occasion for rejoicing and sharing good feelings into a platform for airing grievances and expressing pain.

The sorrows that we face may be collective or personal. However they should not stop us from rejoicing on Eid. Whatever shortcomings and failings the Muslim community might have, there are even more good qualities, blessings, and happy circumstances that they can celebrate. Eid is a chance to recall everything that is positive and everything that can inspire optimism, generosity, and good will.

This does not mean that we should trivialise the suffering of others. At the same time, we should not neglect the rights that we have on ourselves. Ruminating on our sorrows will not make things better. However, showing our support and concern for others with our words and deeds can make a big difference.

Healthy laughter and joy are desirable things. The Prophet used to smile broadly, and he used to joke with his Companion, his family, and the people young and old, whether they were city folk or desert dwellers. Indeed, there were some Companions who were specialists in making people laugh and bringing a smile upon people's faces when the time was right.

The second kind of sorrows we face on Eid are personal in nature. Our personal grief can rob Eid of its joy. As believers who accept Allah's decree and reconcile ourselves to His decision, we praise Allah for making our hardship less than what it could be. Whatever the circumstances, we will find some pleasant things and

see Allah's benevolence upon us, though it may take a person experienced with life to notice them.

A man may have to spend Eid in prison, missing his family and children. While everyone else is celebrating, he is left out. At the same time, prison can liberate the mind from what is customary and provide time to rethink how life has been lived so far. Such a person can decide to rejoice in being near to Allah and have a sense of the freedom of the people of the cave, who fled their palaces saying: "Seek refuge in the Cave. Your Lord will spread for you His mercy and will prepare for you comfort and ease in your affair." [*Sūrah al-Kahf*: 16]

Some people may be sick during Eid. However, illnesses often end in recovery. They are an expiation for our sins and bring us closer to our Lord. Prophet Job was stricken with illness. Allah says: "Truly We found him full of patience and constancy. How excellent in Our service! Ever did he turn (to Us)." [*Sūrah Sād*: 44]

Believers should follow the Prophet's approach. When he was in Mecca, he had his fill of pain, and his sorrows were relentless. There was even a year referred to in history as the Year of Sorrow. However, he also had twelve years that were not years of sorrow, which were filled primarily with happiness and contentment. This was a time when he witnessed the prosperity of Islam and enjoyed the blessing he had in himself, his family, and his wealth, and where he could contemplate the wisdom of Allah's decree. This was how things were for him in Madinah.

He used to joke with his Companions and recite poetry with them, even when they were on a campaign. He ran foot races with 'Ā'ishah while on a campaign. Once he won the race and once she did. [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (2578)]

This shows us that there can be times for joy even under the most trying and difficult circumstances. We can rejoice in Allah's grace and mercy.

Happiness is part of human nature. It is part of life. We need to experience happiness in a balanced manner. Preachers, poets, and opinion leaders need to inspire optimism and present a positive message to the people.

Happiness is a Cure

Happiness and joy can cure us of our sorrows. Allah says: “Say: In the bounty of Allah and in His mercy - in that let them rejoice.” [*Sūrah Yūnus*: 58]

We must learn to remedy our sorrows with joy and good cheer. There are so many things that we can rejoice in. We should rejoice in our very humanity, knowing that Allah has so honoured the human being. We should rejoice in the blessings that we have, and that we often overlook or take for granted. We should feel joy in being alive. We should rejoice in our family and loved ones, and in the provision that Allah has given us.

We should take cheer in thanking Allah for His blessings, since through our gratitude Allah will continue to bless us. When Allah says in the aforementioned verse: “Say: In the bounty of Allah and in His Mercy...” He is calling us to rejoice in His bounty and His mercy. This refers to all the goodness that Allah provides for us in our lives, including but not limited to material wealth.

With respect to Allah’s bounty referring to material wealth, Allah says: “There is no blame on them if they seek after the bounty of their Lord...” [*Sūrah al-Baqarah*: 198]

Allah also says: “And there are others who set out in the world seeking after the bounty of Allah.” [*Sūrah al-Muẓammil*: 20]

Allah’s bounty refers to His providence – to everything that He gives us that we obtain in a wholesome and lawful way. Even if what we are given is little, we should not exhaust ourselves spiritually and emotionally in the pursuit of wealth and in the incessant competition with those who may have more than us. A little wealth that suffices our needs is far better than an abundance of wealth accompanied by avarice and discontent.

Allah likewise tells us to rejoice in His mercy, which we can find in our knowledge of Him, in our faith, in the revelation of the Qur’an, and in the goodness He has placed in our hearts. This is why Prophet Muhammad said: “Only two people are worthy to be envied: someone who is given the Qur’an and recites it in worship day and night, and someone who is given wealth and spends it in charity day and night.” [*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (7529) and *Saḥīḥ Muslim* (815)]

In these two examples mentioned by Prophet Muhammad we are shown people who are given Allah's worldly bounty and His spiritual grace – the good of this world and the next.

When we achieve joy and contentment in these two aspects, we have attained true worldly happiness. This is a blessing that Allah bestows on whomever He pleases. Moreover, it is a blessing born of faith, since faith brings us to pin our hopes on Allah and to set our sights on the Hereafter. Faith allows us to look beyond our present circumstances – even when those circumstances seem hopeless – with the expectation of surmounting them by Allah's grace.

We need to let Eid be a break from our worries and sorrows, and we need to turn that into a long vacation. We should bring to mind our happiness at the end of the month of fasting and glorify Allah for guiding us to His religion.

We need to meet with family, friends, and people in general and feel the joy in our hearts. When our hearts are full of spite, envy, and resentment, they cannot feel joy, so let us rid our hearts of these negative emotions without hesitation and fill them with positive feelings with which we can go forward into the days to come.

Let us make Eid the first essential step to ridding ourselves of our inner sorrows and turmoil. Let us hasten to improve our relationships with those around us. An estranged husband and wife should take Eid as a beautiful opportunity and make that night like their wedding night over again, forgetting their past differences. Brothers who have gone their separate ways can make this day an occasion to bring joy to their parents' lives by embracing each other as brothers again.

Those who are wealthy can spend of what Allah has given them and bring manifold happiness to themselves by bringing joy to orphans, needy children, and the poor.

When we bring happiness to others, the happiness we feel is even greater. Prophet Muhammad told us that Allah says: "O child of Adam, spend on others and Allah you will receive." [*Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (4684) and *Sahīh Muslim* (993)]

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We need to show others that we care, and do what we can to ease their sorrows and lessen their suffering. Even if we have no money to spend, a good word can go a long way.

May we have a blessed and joyful Eid, long lives full of faith, and the pleasure of our Lord. Let us say our farewells to our pain and sorrow and forbid those feelings from taking root. Let us dispel them with genuine hope and positive dreams. Let us trust in Allah that He will provide for us on the road of life, and let us beseech Him humbly and with hope, taking to heart what Allah says: “I am as My servant thinks of Me, so think of Me as you wish.” [*Sabīh Ibn Hibbān* (633, 634)]

Let us think the best of our Lord, knowing that He is forgiving and merciful, and that He answers the prayers of those who beseech Him, and that He is the one upon which we can pin all of our hopes.